

COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. 859.

SYBIL'S SECOND LOVE BY JULIA KAVANAGH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

COLLECTION

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BRITISH ATHERS

VOL. 850

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SYBIL'S SECOND LOVE.

BY

JULIA KAVANAGH,

AUTHOR OF "NATHALIE," "ADÈLE," "QUEEN MAB," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1867.

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SYBIL'S SECOND LOVE

BY

JULIA KAYZAR

AT THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER, 10, NASSAU ST., N.Y.

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SYBIL'S SECOND LOVE.

CHAPTER I.

NOT a word did Miss Glyn utter during dinner-time, and this ominous silence she carried to the drawing-room, and preserved the whole evening. Miss Glyn was meditating over the line of conduct she should adopt in what she mentally called "the present critical circumstances." Her plan was not fully matured till the next morning, when she thought fit to impart it privately to Mr. Kennedy. It was this much, and no more: "After the painful position in which her ignorance of Mr. Dermot's identity had placed her, Miss Glyn felt bound to leave Saint Vincent."

"I cannot remain in the same house with him without apologizing," said Miss Glyn, by way of conclusion; "and I never apologize, it is a matter of principle with me."

In vain Mr. Kennedy assured her that Mr. Dermot felt no sort of resentment against her, that he was quite willing to forgive her unconscious offence. It was another matter of principle with Miss Glyn never to be forgiven, and she said so.

As she tempered all these declarations with some bitter comments on the unpleasant consequences of Mr. Kennedy's want of frankness, that gentleman's

entreaties that she would stay waxed rather cooler, and it was with the faintest show of sorrow that he heard her announce her approaching departure.

"And now," said Miss Glyn, rising, "as Sybil cannot stay here, of course I shall take her with me to England, and Miss Cains can accompany us."

"Thanks!" drily replied Mr. Kennedy. "I wish Sybil to remain."

"Here, Mr. Kennedy, with that Mr. Dermot, who is quite a young man, and *not* her uncle?"

"Mrs. Mush is coming," calmly said Mr. Kennedy.

Miss Glyn's eyes sparkled on hearing her cousin's name.

"Were there twenty Mrs. Mushes here," she said, indignantly, "it is very strange to keep Mr. Dermot in the same house with two girls like Sybil and Miss Cains!"

"I wish neither of them a better husband!" replied Mr. Kennedy, smiling.

Miss Glyn felt very angry, but as she would have found it hard to say about what, she merely uttered an ironical "Indeed, Mr. Kennedy!" and at once left the room.

"I see through it all," wrathfully thought Miss Glyn. "It is very hard to deceive me. James wants Mr. Dermot, who is rich, for Sybil; and Mr. Dermot does not care about Sybil a rush, and is always staring at Miss Cains, who has been angling for him ever since she entered this house. I wonder what Mr. Kennedy will say when he finds that out?"

In the meantime, Miss Glyn went up to her room, and at once commenced packing. After five minutes thus spent, she interrupted the occupation to ring the

bell, and send a message through Denise, after which she became intent again. She was deep in the critical operation of folding a velvet dress — Miss Glyn never kept a maid, "on principle!" — when the handle of her door was turned, and Miss Cains entered the room.

"You have sent for me, Miss Glyn," said that young lady, as if she still doubted the fact.

"I have taken that liberty, Miss Cains," replied Miss Glyn, with a smile, which meant to be gracious. "I am going to leave this house, and do not wish to do so without having a talk with you. Pray be seated."

Miss Cains looked as if she would rather stand, but she complied, nevertheless, with the elder lady's request, and cast a half-admiring, half-careless look on the velvet dress.

"What a pile it has!" she said. "If ever I have money to spend, I shall have a dress like that, Miss Glyn."

Miss Glyn looked stiff, and said, "Indeed!" She thought the remark a highly indecorous one, considering Miss Cains's position, both social and pecuniary.

"I do like velvet!" continued Blanche, with a fond intonation in her voice. "It is so soft, so fur-like. I always fancy it is the skin of some feline beast or other — don't you?"

"No," rather sharply said Miss Glyn, and throwing the dress on the bed, she abruptly changed the subject of conversation by saying:

"You know I am going?"

"I did not know it, Miss Glyn, but from these signs of packing I fear you are."

"I am going, and not to return — and Mr. Dermot remains."

Blanche gently bent her head, and as she sat near the bed, extended her white hand to feel the quality of the fascinating velvet.

"My dear Miss Cains," said Miss Glyn with considerable asperity, "you really must attend to me; this is a matter that concerns you nearly."

"Oh! but I am attending," said Blanche very sweetly.

"Well, as I said, Mr. Dermot remains, and Mr. Dermot and Mr. Kennedy are both unmarried — allow me to suggest this house is no home for you."

Miss Cains looked very grave, but did not answer. Miss Glyn resumed:

"You are young and handsome; you are poor, too, and your fair name is everything to you. I am going to England, and I will take you with me, and place you with a friend of mine, who will be glad of your society until you have found such a situation as your talents and accomplishments cannot fail to secure."

"You are too kind," said Blanche.

"Am I to understand that you accept?"

"Why, no, thank you, Miss Glyn," replied Miss Cains with much urbanity. "I am twenty-five, and can take care of myself. But do tell me where you got that velvet; I shall enjoy no peace of mind till I have a dress like it."

"That will do, Miss Cains," said Miss Glyn angrily, taking the dress away and tossing it on a chair beyond the young lady's reach, "that will do. I had my suspicions — they are certainty now — I know exactly what you are about."

"Then you know more than I do, Miss Glyn," replied Blanche rather scornfully; "however, that will do, as you say."

She rose, bowed, received a stiff nod in return, and left the room. She went up at once to her own apartment, opened the chest of drawers with which it was furnished, emptied it of its contents, and deliberately began packing up her trunk. She had not long been thus engaged, when Sybil came in upon her. She remained amazed and mute on seeing the bed covered with the various articles of Miss Cains's wardrobe.

"Blanche, what does it mean?" she asked at length.

"I am going away," coolly replied Blanche. "Miss Glyn, who is leaving, has just pointed out the impropriety of my remaining in this house, when you, a mere child, are at the head of it; and though I would not confess she was right, she is right, and I am leaving Saint Vincent, which, if I had not been so thoughtless, I should never have entered."

Sybil changed colour, then said sharply,

"You shall not go!"

"Oh! but I must — your aunt has just informed me that I had designs upon Mr. Dermot. Designs upon *him*, Sybil!"

Miss Cains looked magnificent in her scorn of this imputation, which utterly confounded Sybil.

"And so it is on his account you leave!" she cried half angrily. "He sends aunt away, and you — Blanche, he will make me detest him! Why does he not go?"

"I suppose, poor wretch! because he has got into

good quarters," disdainfully replied Miss Cains. "Well, I am poor myself, and will not throw his poverty in his face — only stay here I cannot."

She knelt on the floor and resumed her packing.

"Now, Blanche, that is nonsense," coolly replied Sybil; "I will not let you go."

Miss Cains looked up.

"I must go," she said, "and I will."

"We shall see that," cried Sybil, darting out of the room.

She ran downstairs to seek her father. In her eagerness to make him keep her friend, she forgot that Miss Glyn was leaving; but as she passed by that lady's door, a sharp call of "Sybil!" suddenly checked her progress, and reminded her of the fact. She entered the room, and saw Miss Glyn standing in the midst of her trunks, with the look of a commander-in-chief on a field-day.

"Oh, dear!" ruefully cried Sybil, "every one is packing up."

"Who else is going?" asked Miss Glyn.

"Blanche says she must go, after what you have said. Oh! aunt, do stay — do, pray, do!"

Miss Glyn had called in Sybil for the express purpose of telling her that Miss Cains was one of the most imprudent young ladies she had ever met with, but the announcement of the sinner's approaching departure silenced her. She tightened up her lips, and bridled up, and looked much, but said nothing.

"Do stay!" again entreated Sybil; "do, pray, do!"

"Not with Mr. Dermot in the house," was the stern reply.

"Then I detest Mr. Dermot!" cried Sybil, with angry tears — "I detest him!"

"You would not have a penny but for him," coldly replied Miss Glyn. "Mr. Dermot has been your father's best friend, and I sincerely lament his approaching fate."

"Fate! — what fate?" asked Sybil, changing colour.

"Ask Miss Cains."

"Oh! aunt," cried Sybil, reddening, "how can you say so? — she hates him."

"You are the simplest child; she hates him, does she? — and all she wants is to be Mrs. Dermot. She has been setting her cap at him all along, as she set it at the Count — as she will set it at every man who comes to this house — you will never have a chance whilst she is by, Sybil."

"You do not suppose, aunt, I want that chance from her?" indignantly asked Sybil.

"So much the better for you, my dear, for you would not get it."

Sybil wanted to answer this, but Miss Glyn said that she was very busy, and would rather that she should go. Sybil left her, still flushed and indignant. It was not true; she did not believe it. It was not true, for he did not like Blanche, and on Blanche herself it was a cruel slander. And Blanche should not go; she should tell her father so, and he would keep her. She entered Mr. Kennedy's study — a quiet room near the library — without knocking, and abruptly exclaimed:

"Papa, you will not let Blanche go, will you?"

Mr. Dermot, and not Mr. Kennedy, emerged from

behind the window-curtain. He had been standing there reading a letter, with his back to Sybil, who had not seen him.

"Mr. Kennedy is out," he said — "can I do anything for you, Miss Kennedy?"

The request put Sybil into a rage.

"No, Mr. Dermot," she said, sharply; "I came to ask my father to undo your work — you cannot assist me."

"How do you know?" he asked, with a smile; "my work, as you call it, can best be undone by me. I confess I do not know what work you mean, but I do know I am willing to oblige you."

"You are very kind," replied Sybil, "but you will allow me to doubt that you can keep Aunt Glyn and Miss Cains, when both are determined to leave on your account."

"On my account! — I was not aware I had affronted Miss Cains too. Miss Glyn, I confess, I cannot hope to detain, but I may succeed with your friend."

"I suppose your influence over her is greater than mine?" said Sybil, her eyes sparkling.

"I never meant that."

"Then what did you mean?"

"The end will show."

"I know," said Sybil, turning crimson — "you have more power with papa than I have. I know it, Mr. Dermot — I have seen it before to-day."

"It would be very strange indeed if you had not seen that," he composedly answered; "but I am afraid you are not in a very good temper, so I shall not trouble you any more with proffers of service."

He left the room; his look, his tone had not varied;

both had preserved their coolness and composure. Sybil felt exasperated. She flung herself across the table, and cried bitterly.

"Why, Pussy, what is the matter?" said her father's voice.

She looked up, her face all flushed.

"I am wretched!" vehemently said Sybil, "and Mr. Dermot is the cause of it all, and only puts on his grand, composed ways to vex me, and make me miserable; and I shall not be happy whilst he remains in the house!" passionately added Sybil.

"Then, my dear, you are not likely to be happy just yet," very coolly said her father.

Indignation kept Sybil silent.

"Come, Pussy, let us talk sense for once," said Mr. Kennedy, sitting down, and drawing her on his knee. "Do you know who this hateful Dermot is? — why, he is simply one of the best, noblest, and grandest fellows that ever lived. There is more than flesh and blood between us, Sybil — ay, ten times more. He helped me to marry his sister, and by so doing brought on himself a bitter persecution. He bore blows, threats, and contumely for my sake, and was turned adrift at sixteen, and I was the cause, Sybil. Well, I have paid that debt. I was often short of money — often weighed down with cares — but he never suffered — never, and he knows it. Since he has been a man, we have been fast friends, and you may judge what chance there is of your being made happy by his removal from the house."

"Yes," replied Sybil jealously, "and that is the worst of all; you love him more than you love me. I thought I was everything since I came from school,

and I now see I have a rival; and how can I like Mr. Dermot, since he sends aunt, and even Blanche, away."

"Oh! but Miss Cains must not go," hastily said Mr. Kennedy; "she must stay and *chaperone* you, Pussy."

"She wants some one to *chaperone* her, and will go to-morrow, she says."

"Tell her that she must not go, and that Mrs. Mush is coming. Or stay, I shall tell her so myself."

"I shall go and fetch her!" cried Sybil, all eagerness.

She ran out of the study, and found herself face to face with Mr. Dermot. In her joy she would not have minded making it up with him, but Mr. Dermot was probably wearied of her caprices, for he made room for her to pass with a cold look, that promised Sybil eternal indifference.

"What do I care?" she thought, going upstairs. "Does he fancy, perhaps, that I care about him? Indeed, I will show him I do not — yes, I will show him, and every one else too!"

"Blanche, Blanche," she cried gaily as she entered the room where Miss Cains sat resting after her packing, "empty your trunk — you are not going. Papa says you must not — Mrs. Mush is coming. Come down and hear him say so."

Miss Cains wanted to resist, but Sybil took her hand and compelled her downstairs.

"Miss Cains," kindly said Mr. Kennedy, when the two girls entered the study, "you cannot leave us — you must not go. I understand and appreciate your motives; but Sybil cannot afford to lose her friend.

My cousin Mrs. Mush has promised to come in a day or two. I trust her presence in the house will remove all your scruples. Allow me to add, that by remaining you will be conferring the greatest favour upon me."

Blanche coloured and hesitated.

"Oh! Blanche," entreated Sybil, clinging to her, "stay, do stay, if you love me. Do, my darling."

Still Miss Cains hesitated. But Sybil's entreaties grew more and more fervent. Mr. Kennedy threw in a few earnest and cordial words, and reluctantly, like one who yields against her better judgment, Miss Cains gave way.

"It is for your sake, darling," she whispered, returning Sybil's fond embrace.

"Of course it is," gaily said Sybil.

"And so this matter is settled, and all right, is it?" said Mr. Kennedy with evident satisfaction.

"Oh! yes, and I am so happy," cried Sybil with sparkling eyes.

Blanche smiled, and softly smoothed Sybil's dark hair; and Mr. Kennedy thought he had seldom seen a prettier group than that before him, when an unwelcome intrusion disturbed this pleasant contemplation. The door opened, and Miss Glyn entered the room fully equipped for her journey.

"I have come to bid you good-bye, Mr. Kennedy," she said rather grandly; "for there is no reason, of course, why we should not part friends."

"None, indeed, my dear Miss Glyn," he said, kindly going up to her; "I only regret you think it necessary we should part at all."

"Now, Mr. Kennedy, you know I would not stay here, and all that amazes me is that you will keep Mr.

Dermot, having as you have a daughter of Sybil's age, and knowing as you know what the world will say. Miss Cains," she added, with an approving glance towards that young lady, "has shown her sense of the state of things by resolving to leave the house."

"Miss Cains is staying," coolly said Mr. Kennedy. "I am happy to say that she has yielded to my request, seconded by Pussy's entreaties."

"Miss Cains is staying!" echoed Miss Glyn in a hollow voice — "then I was not mistaken after all;" and she added with a contemptuous look at her niece, "Sybil, you are a fool!"

Sybil reddened, and Mr. Kennedy looked angry.

"Miss Glyn, explain yourself," he said.

"No, no," returned that lady with a sagacious nod, "I know my own meaning, and am satisfied with it. Good afternoon, Mr. Kennedy; good afternoon, Miss Cains; good afternoon, Sybil. I congratulate you all on your wisdom — thank heaven, I am out of it!"

With which enigmatic words, Miss Glyn walked out of the room, followed by Sybil only. Mr. Kennedy was probably too much affronted to pay his sister-in-law that last courtesy. Miss Glyn took no notice of Sybil till they both stood on the threshold of the abbey gates. She then turned round to her, and said calmly,

"Sybil, you have chosen to be wise, and you will pay the penalty. You acted against my advice all along; you have already suffered, and you will suffer still more. That girl is a serpent, and her name should be Cain, not Cains. But for her you would be Count André de Renneville's wife. She is a serpent, and

you will find it out later. Never hope to marry whilst she is here. I might say more, but where would be the use? The mischief is done, and past your mending. I am going, but I shall soon return to this neighbourhood; and you can always come to me, Sybil, if you need it. There, good-bye, child; give my compliments to Mr. Dermot, and tell him he has acted like a gentleman."

Miss Glyn gave Sybil a cold embrace, entered the carriage which was waiting, and drove away from her brother-in-law's house, to enter it no more.

Anger, indignation, surprise, had kept Sybil mute whilst her aunt was speaking; but she saw her go with a sense of relief. It was more than the young girl could bear patiently to be told to mistrust her dearest friend, and to hear her coolly called a serpent.

Unfortunately, she had not been the only one to hear Miss Glyn's parting speech. When she turned back from the gates she saw Blanche standing behind her, pale as death, but with flaming eyes. Sybil threw her arms around the neck of her friend.

"I do not believe it!" she cried. "I love you! I trust you entirely. I do not believe it!"

"What a sin it is to be poor!" moodily said Miss Cains, scarcely heeding Sybil's caresses; "that is my crime, you see. I am poor, and therefore suspected of every baseness. Sybil, as I live, I never wished for the Count."

"I know it! — I know it!" said Sybil, leading her up to the drawing-room. "I know it, and I trust you entirely. I love you too well, Blanche, to doubt you!"

The large room was vacant. Blanche sunk down

on a chair near the fire, and Sybil, kneeling on the carpet at her feet, looked up fondly in the face of her friend. It was flushed now, and tears shone in Blanche Cains's blue eyes.

"Sybil," she said, "I never shall be unkind to you — never! — never!"

"Unkind!" laughed Sybil; "don't I know it!"

Her look as she glanced upwards was the very sublime of faith. It was full, too, very full, of affection. You will be loved, Blanche Cains, and by an adoring husband, ere your tale is done; but never will there be, in a human heart, the trust and love for you which now burn in the heart of that fond, kneeling girl.

CHAPTER II.

A LONG languid calm followed the agitation which had preceded and caused Miss Glyn's departure from Saint Vincent. Mrs. Mush, who was to come in two days, did not appear; and though Mr. Kennedy said not one word on this subject, Miss Cains, to Sybil's great relief, never talked of the impropriety of remaining, nor packed up her trunk to go.

So weeks sped by in the dulness and retirement of a secluded country life; for Sybil had ceased going out, and few visitors crossed the threshold of Saint Vincent since Miss Glyn was no longer there to receive them. Indeed, that lady's departure, and the long visit of Miss Cains, were variously commented upon by the little world which met to drink tea and talk scandal at Mrs. Ronald's.

Some of these comments were repeated to Mr. Kennedy; but he did not think it necessary to repeat them again, and no one in the Abbey knew a word of them. Matters went on pretty smoothly in that quiet dwelling, and, save in one respect, entirely to Mr. Kennedy's satisfaction. Neither coaxing, nor entreaties, nor commands, could induce Sybil to make up her long and obstinate quarrel with Mr. Dermot.

"He had offended her," she said, "and it was impossible she should go and beg his pardon."

So she wrapped herself in her dignity, as in a mantle, and kept aloof. If by this haughty bearing Sybil thought to induce Mr. Dermot to sue again for her lost favour, she was disappointed. Mr. Kennedy, indeed, tried to induce him to go once more "and make it up with Pussy," but Mr. Dermot flatly refused to do so. If Sybil chose to be offended with him, Mr. Dermot was plainly offended with her. Worse still, that fondness and affection he had so long shown seemed to have left no traces of their being behind. Mr. Kennedy was vexed, and he showed his displeasure to Sybil.

"You have affronted Mr. Dermot," he said sharply; "you have lost his friendship and his regard by your absurd affectation of dignity. I am very angry, Sybil."

Sybil reddened, and was amazed at so harsh a reproof. She liked Mr. Dermot none the better for it. What was he, that he turned her father against her, and changed Mr. Kennedy's indulgent admiration of all her little caprices into censure so severe? If he thought to conquer her by that, she would show him he was mistaken. Accordingly, Sybil infused a double

amount of coldness in her bearing towards Mr. Dermot. But Mr. Dermot looked, as he no doubt felt, profoundly indifferent. He was thirty, a man of the world, a friend, and not a lover. What were Sybil's frowns to him? He could live without the sunshine of her smiles, and sleep none the worse because he had forfeited her good graces. Miss Cains watched all this with a keen, attentive look, but said very little to Sybil. That little Sybil answered with some asperity. "What did she care about Mr. Dermot, or his grand ways? She knew he put them on to vex her; but he was sadly mistaken if he thought she cared a pin. Not she; and he must be blind not to see it."

Mr. Dermot, and, indeed, every one in Saint Vincent, must have been blind not to see that Sybil was very lively. She sang from morning till night, she was restlessly busy, she laughed about everything, and she had never been in higher spirits. But Sybil's gaiety no more moved Mr. Dermot than her previous gravity; and when she suddenly relapsed into a silent and rather languid mood, he was the same as ever — strictly civil, and no more. Matters stood thus, when Sybil found herself alone with him in the drawing-room one afternoon. Spring was late that year, and the day was dull and grey; Sybil sat, for the light, near one window, and Mr. Dermot, for the same purpose, near another. She sewed, and he read. She let her work drop upon her lap, and looked up at him. Something in his newspaper called up a smile on his face. Sybil knew that smile well. It was genial and pleasant; a smile which shone back in his eyes, and gave them a warm lustre. "I wish we were friends again," thought Sybil; "I know he likes me as I like

him. I wonder what he would say if I were to talk to him now?" The temptation was strong, and Sybil yielded to it.

"Mr. Dermot," she said.

Mr. Dermot looked up from his paper, but did not put it down. Sybil's heart failed her a little, but she took courage, and continued:

"I have been very remiss."

"Pray, how so?"

"Aunt gave me a message for you, and I never delivered it."

Mr. Dermot waited in silence. She resumed:

"My aunt desired me to give her compliments to you, and tell you that you behaved like a gentleman."

Mr. Dermot smiled coldly; but all he said was:

"I am very much obliged to you;" with which he took up his paper once more.

Sybil's heart was very full. So this was how he received her little advances — with that freezing coldness. After that, how could she address him again? "I cannot, and I will not," thought Sybil. "Never more will I open my lips to him. Blanche, whom he pretends to dislike, he would not have dared to treat so." She could have shed tears of mortification, and longed to be out of the room, far from his presence. She had no need to wish so long, for after a few minutes had passed, Mr. Dermot put down his paper and left the drawing-room.

They did not meet again till dinner, and then his manner was just as polite and as distant as ever. Mr. Dermot treated Sybil with the greatest courtesy, and did not bestow upon her one unnecessary word.

The chief part of his conversation, indeed, was directed to Mr. Kennedy, and referred to business matters.

"What do you think of the Quebec Johnsons?" he asked, rather abruptly, as the meal drew to a close.

"Not much good," replied Mr. Kennedy, with a peculiar smile. "What do you think of them?"

Mr. Dermot's lip curled, and there was a light in his eye that said much, but other reply he did not give; and Mr. Kennedy forbore to press the question.

"Who are these Quebec Johnsons?" asked Blanche of Sybil, when they sat alone in the drawing-room, before the gentlemen joined them.

"I don't know," languidly replied Sybil; "some of papa's correspondents, I believe."

"Green Eyes does not like them. Eh?"

"I don't care about him, or his likes and his dislikes," tartly said Sybil.

Blanche laughed, and resumed:

"You remember that pink-eyed Anna, from Canada? She was a Johnson, was she not?"

"No: her name was Smithson."

"So it was. I wonder what put Johnson into my head, then?"

Sybil did not answer; she felt in no mood for speech, grave or trivial. Silence was sweet to her just then, for it seemed to lull the secret sting she could not get rid of. Blanche did not tease her with talk, but stretched herself in an easy chair, and looked at the blazing fire in happy indolence. The entrance of Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Dermot did not make her change her attitude.

"She is wonderfully handsome!" thought Sybil,

looking at her, and detecting the looks which the two gentlemen cast upon her as they both took their places, "and no wonder that both papa and he should see it. I shall never be admired as Blanche is — never!"

"Miss Cains," said Mr. Kennedy, "it is a mortal sin to disturb you, you seem so happy; but, for all that, will you have a game of chess?"

Mr. Kennedy was fond of chess, and now and then he thus challenged Miss Cains of an evening. As a rule, she took up the glove, but now she demurred.

"Must I?" she said reluctantly. "Why do you not ask Sybil, Mr. Kennedy?"

"Sybil hates chess."

"Well, then, ask Mr. Dermot. He is a fine chess-player, I know."

Mr. Kennedy looked in some surprise at Mr. Dermot, who smiled, evidently not in denial. Then Mr. Kennedy said a little gravely,

"And pray, Miss Cains, how do you know — I confess I did not — that Mr. Dermot possesses this accomplishment?"

"Because he told me so. I always believe people when they praise themselves."

Mr. Kennedy laughed.

"Professional jealousy," he said. "I know you are a very fine chess-player, Miss Cains, and I shall put Mr. Dermot to the test. Dermot, come and play a game with Miss Cains, whilst I look on and act as umpire."

"With great pleasure," replied Mr. Dermot, rising and bringing forth the little chess-table, which he placed before Miss Cains. She laughed and shook her

head, and looked very becomingly lazy, but for all that she yielded, and sat up, and the game began. The two antagonists had not proceeded beyond the first two or three moves, before a letter was brought in to Mr. Kennedy. He walked away to read it, and instead of returning to the chess-table, fell in a brown study by the fire. Sybil sat at the other end of the room reading, but ere long her book fell on her lap. She felt troubled, and she would have found it hard to say why she felt so; but the quiet current of her former life seemed gone for ever, and that pleasant stream now flowed in restless waves. Why was it so?

Oh! how long ago seemed the days when Sybil was light-hearted. Even her first grief — Count de Renneville's treachery — now wore a remote look. When Sybil thought of that time, she asked herself if she had ever loved him! It seemed to her that her liking for him was essentially subordinate to his existence as a being of romance. Take that halo from him, and her worship died out, like a spent fire, leaving nought save cold ashes behind. She still smarted from the sense of his betrayal, but that was wounded faith, not wounded love. Her daily quarrel with Mr. Dermot had scattered the last vestiges of that regret, as the first gale of winter scatters autumn leaves.

"I have lived an age since the Count went," thought Sybil.

And so she had. She had learned that trouble and untruth can take more than one aspect. She did her best not to blame her father in her thoughts, but she felt that, by introducing Mr. Dermot as his brother, he had wronged his child. He had taught her that deceit can sit by the domestic hearth — a cruel lesson, which

should ever be spared the young. And that Mr. Dermot, how he had played his part, how he had cheated her out of her affection and confidence, caring nothing for either all the time. And Sybil remembered how she had cried on his shoulder, how her heart had beat as she held his letter in her hand, and thought, "This is the letter of a friend." It was bitter, very bitter. But who had spared her? Miss Glyn had stung her to the very heart, and gone, leaving the arrow in the wound. Sybil was not jealous, or envious, but she could not forget — what woman could? — that her lover had preferred her friend to her. Was Miss Glyn's prophecy to be fulfilled, and was Blanche ever to become her involuntary rival? That would be hard. She looked at her. Miss Cains was leaning back in her chair, her hand uplifted, and staying so in the act of making a decisive move. Mr. Dermot, bending forward, his arms folded on the table, looked intently at his fair enemy's face. A sudden suspicion flashed across Sybil's mind. What proof had she that Blanche's dislike was returned? Suppose he admired and loved her?

There had been a time when such a thought would have filled Sybil's heart with gladness — when she would have rejoiced to think that her uncle and her friend should unite in love and life, but now that thought was odious. He had taken so large a share of her father's affections, that she disliked him as much for that as for his other misdeeds, but that he should even attempt to take her friend, or think of it, was not to be endured.

She rose and went up to them, resolved to disturb his contemplation, pleasing though he found it; but

Mr. Dermot's eyes never moved, and yet he must have heard, if he had not seen her. It was all his insolence, his hateful, odious insolence. She stood by the table, a small square one, scarcely larger than the chessboard that rested upon it. An impulse, an irresistible impulse, and certainly neither a wise nor a right one, made Sybil walk deliberately on as if nothing stood in her way. With a crash the table capsized, the chess-men flew about the room, and Sybil herself would have stumbled, and perhaps fallen, if Mr. Dermot had not caught her in his arms.

"Let me go!" she said, struggling like a wild thing. "Let me go!"

But he did not let her go, for he was seriously alarmed. Sybil was pale as death, and trembled in every limb. All his old tenderness seemed to come back.

"Hush, my darling!" he said, softly, "hush! What ails you? Why, you were walking straight into the fire, and with that thin dress, too. I will not let you go, so sit down here."

Sybil yielded, and sat down, but she kept her eyes bent. Her father and Miss Cains stood near her and addressed her, but she did not answer one word.

"What was it?" anxiously said Mr. Kennedy, looking at Mr. Dermot.

Mr. Dermot shuddered as he replied:

"She did not see the table, and was walking into the fire."

"You look as bad as she does, Ned!"

"I saw a lady burned to death last year, and one does not forget such sights. Come, Sybil, there is no danger; look up, it is all right, is it not?"

He stooped and looked into her face.

"Oh! yes, it is all right," said Sybil, with a little shiver; "but I feel very ill! — very ill!"

"But her dress is on fire," cried Mr. Kennedy. "I smell it burning."

"No, it is not, I put my foot upon it at once."

It was Mr. Dermot who spoke.

"I think I had better go upstairs," said Sybil, nervously.

"I shall go with you, dear," said Miss Cains.

"No — no, pray do not," replied Sybil, with something like eagerness.

Miss Cains did not insist; but the door had scarcely closed on Sybil, when she rose and followed her out.

"Ay, do, Miss Cains," said Mr. Kennedy, anxiously. "I do not fancy the child being left alone."

There was a pause after Miss Cains was gone; then Mr. Kennedy said very seriously:

"Something ails Pussy."

"She is excitable," answered Mr. Dermot.

"She has not recovered that affair with Count de Renneville — and yet it was all her own doing."

Mr. Dermot shook his head impatiently.

"What has she to regret in him?" he asked, with some scorn.

"No, no, I do not agree with you there, Ned. He was handsome, and gentlemanlike, and courteous, and he had that chivalrous air which girls like — he was a Count too! No, no, I do not wonder [at Sybil — only, if she regrets him, why did she pack him off? I have been thinking that this matter might be mended ;

and do you know, Ned, I think you are just the man to do it."

"I?"

"Yes, why not?"

"I would see her dead first!"

Mr. Dermot spoke with considerable energy, and was evidently what Mr. Kennedy was in the habit of calling "right down in earnest!" He whistled, and scanned attentively his friend's flushed and almost angry face, and a suspicion that Mr. Dermot was smitten with Sybil himself found its way into Mr. Kennedy's mind.

"Well, well," he said, carelessly, "Sybil will not want for a husband; she is a decidedly pretty girl!"

Mr. Dermot was silent, and did not seem to have heard him.

"And you know, Ned, what a clever little pussy she is! always reading, and when she talks, as wise as if she were forty. I never saw such a girl!"

"Pretty!" said Mr. Dermot, dreamily. "Yes, she is pretty, and, as you say, she is clever; but, James, she is better than all that — she is simply charming!"

His voice was low and very musical, as he spoke — music that seemed to come from the depths of his heart. His look was soft and vague, and his lip smiled. He seemed in one of those unguarded moods, when man or woman must needs betray the most jealously cherished secret. He did not see Mr. Kennedy's smile, he did not detect the triumphant light in his eye; his own look was bent on the fire, and seemed to read something there, a tale full of sweetness and alluring promises.

But subtle, and often deceiving, is the language of a human face. The story which Mr. Dermot read was past, not future.

"How that girl would have tempted me seven years ago!" he thought.

He did not think, "Here is an exquisite prize within my reach — let me make an effort to secure it." For a moment he went back to his youth, and put Sybil there, as we put the heroes and heroines of our favourite books in our daily life. For a moment she was his young mistress, despotic but fond, and adored. The next she was Sybil, and he Mr. Dermot, who once more forgave her little caprices, and cordially wished her a good husband.

"And she has money too," continued Mr. Kennedy.

"And that," gaily said Mr. Dermot, "will get her counts by the dozen."

"To be sure, and so it ought," stoutly replied Mr. Kennedy, who was a true worshipper of Mammon.

On going up to her room, Sybil had flung herself on her bed, and there burst into piteous sobs and moans, meant for no one's ear; but she had forgotten to lock her door, and when it opened and admitted Miss Cains, Sybil started up, flushed, ashamed, and angry, and with a hasty gesture, threw back her dishevelled hair, and looked almost sullenly at her friend.

"Come, I will have none of those looks," said Miss Cains, going up to her, and speaking gaily, and yet very firmly; "I know I am an intruder, but I will intrude because you are ill, not in body, but in mind. I know what ails you, Sybil, and I come to

tell you this: you must never — never think of that man; he is not good; he is not true, and he does not like you."

She spoke in a clear, cold, and deliberate voice, which confounded Sybil, and with the strangeness of her address, kept her mute. Miss Cains continued —

"I know you think me hard — the fact is, I am a surgeon now, and can show no mercy."

"I ask for none," replied Sybil — "I only ask for peace."

"That means, 'leave me;' but I cannot leave you, Sybil, because you are in grief. Good heavens! what can you see in him?" she exclaimed, impatiently — "a doubtful name, a bad temper, and nothing to redeem either."

Sybil stood up, and looked firmly at Miss Cains.

"Blanche," she said, "do you like him?"

"You mean, do I love him?" said Miss Cains, with flashing eyes — "no, Sybil, and no ten times."

Sybil flung her arms round the neck of her friend, and burst into piteous sobs and tears.

"Then pity me — pity me!" she said, "for I do."

"Do you?" said Blanche, and if Sybil had looked up, she would have thought that her friend looked very moody indeed.

CHAPTER III.

It is a strange thing this love, which so often makes the wise lose their senses, and which often, too, gives wisdom to fools. A subtle, penetrating power, it has pervaded earth since the days when she was young, and it is as fresh and pure in this, her ripe maturity, as when she rose smiling from the depths of chaos, so wondrous and so fair, that the very angels acknowledged her beauty. Mysterious Eros! well might the old world make a god of thee, and tremble before thy might, when it saw thee rule the human heart, and laugh every other passion to scorn! A very chameleon thou hast been, pure with the delicate, coarse with the low — with many impassioned or sublime. What aspect hast thou not taken? and under which hast thou not triumphed? Happy they who pass unscathed through thine ordeal, and who do not leave some grace, some virtue, some charm of mind or heart in these scorching fires! They are amongst the chosen ones, and may boast. They are the gold refined, which has gone through the crucible of Time and Sorrow.

Through this ordeal Sybil was now to pass; and how she would come forth — nobler, better, and more generous, or fretful, embittered, and scorned, was still a tale to tell. When she awoke the next morning, she felt very ill, and would not rise. Her whole frame ached, and she was in a parching fever. On her own authority Miss Cains bade her friend keep her room,

and took her post by her bedside — a zealous and unremitting nurse.

“But you must make haste and get well again, please,” she said gaily, “for, thanks to you, I am fast losing Mr. Kennedy’s good graces. He decidedly resents my being so well when Pussy is ill.”

Sybil smiled languidly, then coloured, and turned her flushed face to the wall, as a step passed by her door. But Miss Cains would not see this, for there was a subject on which they must not speak.

After a few days Sybil got well again, and resolved one morning to go down stairs to breakfast. But she did not say so to Miss Cains, and whilst that young lady was dressing Sybil softly stole down. There was no one in the dining-room when she entered it, but a blazing fire burned on the hearth, and Sybil, who felt chilly, knelt on the rug before it. Presently the door opened, but Sybil would not look round. She knew it was not her father, nor Blanche, nor any of the servants — breakfast would not be ready for an hour yet — she knew it was Mr. Dermot.

“Why, you little fire-worshipper!” he said gaily, “are you up and well again?”

He now stood by her side. And Sybil, still kneeling, looked up at him. Nature had bestowed a handsome face and person on Mr. Dermot; but gravity or care could darken his aspect in a very remarkable manner. On the contrary, joy, and merely pleasure, lit up his countenance, and gave it a brilliancy and a glow which made him look ten years younger. As she saw him now, Sybil had never seen him before; Mr. Dermot looked the happiest of men. There was hap-

piness in his eye, and happiness in his smile; Sybil felt both amazed and dazzled.

"I am very well again," she said; "but what ails you, Mr. Dermot?"

"Sit up, and I will tell you; but you remember the seal of Alexander on Ephestion's lips?"

"I never repeat what you tell me," gravely said Sybil.

"I knew it, Sybil, I knew it," he said with a peculiar smile. "Well, then, wish me joy, my little friend, wish me joy — for I am free!"

Sybil heard him with a shock of joy. Free! Mr. Dermot was free! Then it was not at least a sin to think of him. She wronged none save her own poor self by so doing. From her heart she cried:

"Thank God."

He took her hand, and raised it to his lips.

"What made you so cross so long?" he asked with a smile.

Sybil trembled. A wild passionate joy, an under-current of tumultuous happiness, passed through the abiding sorrow at her heart. She knew very well Mr. Dermot did not love her; but hope said that he might some day. Just now he looked as if she were very dear to him. Why might she not grow dearer still!

"What made you so cross so long?" he asked again. "I mean so cross with me."

At another time Sybil would have answered him with a saucy look and still more saucy speech; now she could not. She withdrew her hand from his, and looked at the fire and smiled, as she answered:

"I really don't know, Mr. Dermot; forget and forgive it."

"Confess it was Miss Cains's doing."

Sybil reddened.

"It was my own perversity, and nothing else," she said gravely.

"Then do not be perverse again, my dear," he said very kindly.

"Ah! if he knew — if he knew!" thought Sybil.

Her eyes were bent on the fire, and she did not perceive that Mr. Dermot's searching look was fastened on her face. Sybil was much altered, in manner, even more than in looks; his curiosity was roused, and he was endeavouring to read in her saddened countenance the secret of her trouble.

"Sybil!" he said suddenly, "do you regret Count de Renneville?"

"Regret a traitor, a false gentleman!" cried Sybil with quick resentment.

"No, you could not — I knew it; well, thank God you too are free! Ah! what would you feel if it were not three months, but three years, that were blotted from your life! Look, Sybil, here is my liberty."

He took out and showed her a packet of letters. For awhile he held it poised in his hand, and his face was dark and severe all the time.

"What wretched stuff there must be in them!" he said moodily. "What a prostration of man's mind and pride that love makes! I am ashamed, Sybil, when I think of it."

His face was flushed. Sybil looked at him, then at the letters. How she longed to read one, but one, the fondest. It would have pained her, but still she would have liked to see in what language Mr. Dermot

wrote of love to the woman he loved. Wretched woman, how had she forfeited his heart? How did she feel, now that it was lost and gone, and she was left all desolate and forlorn? Mr. Dermot took the letters, and thrust them one by one into the fire. No pity, no remorse for that dead love held him back. His look was scornful, his smile derisive. One after another the flame caught these letters and consumed them, and when the last lay a black parched scroll before him, Mr. Dermot breathed a relieved sigh and said: "Let that folly be forgotten — eh, Sybil?"

Sybil awoke as if out of a dream.

"Folly, was it folly?" she said.

"Arrant folly! And let us hope that Edward Dermot is now a wise man. I should not like, poor fellow, to see him fall into such a trap again!"

"I will die before he suspects anything!" thought Sybil, looking at him.

"Now, what does that look mean?" he asked quickly — "tell me, Sybil."

Sybil turned red and pale; but she was spared the trouble of replying; the door opened, and Blanche Cains appeared on the threshold. Mr. Dermot looked round slowly, and Sybil saw them exchange a cold, long look of dislike and defiance.

"What are you doing with my patient, Mr. Dermot?" asked Blanche, smiling as she came forward.

"Admiring her, Miss Cains," he composedly replied. "She looks a very rosy patient, just now!"

"She is undutiful," said Blanche. "I had not the least suspicion she was down here."

But Sybil did not blush or look conscious. She

knew she had not come down to see Mr. Dermot, or to be with him; and, in her pride, she felt above the reach of accusation implied or spoken. So she gave her friend a clear look, and smiled as she answered,

"I wished to surprise you all."

That manner she preserved all day. She remained composed, rather silent, but very calm. She did not speak, unless when spoken to, and then she seemed to come out of some far dream, not melancholy or unpleasant, but very remote.

"Something ails Pussy," said Mr. Kennedy to his friend.

He seemed puzzled, but was not half so much so as Mr. Dermot. This was a new Sybil — not the merry little Sybil of old days — not the blushing Sybil, whom the Count of Renneville had wooed; still less the pale, sad Sybil, whom he had betrayed, but another Sybil, calm and thoughtful, who lived in a world beyond Mr. Dermot's ken, and did not seem unhappy there.

The day was wet and uncongenial. Mr. Dermot had little to do; some portion of his time was spent in the drawing-room, and as his curiosity was roused, he would probably have devoted that portion to studying and perhaps questioning Sybil, if Miss Cains had not pertinaciously sat by her friend, and kept him aloof. Not one second did she leave her, till Mr. Kennedy asked for his game of chess in the evening. Then, indeed, she rose from her seat on the couch near Sybil, but evident was her reluctance.

"Come and look at me playing," she said coaxingly.

"No; I cannot endure chess," replied Sybil.

"Then Mr. Dermot will keep you company," pointedly said Miss Cains, looking at Mr. Dermot in the act of rising.

"The very thing I intend doing, Miss Cains," he answered, sinking down into her vacant place.

"Why are they so at war!" thought Sybil, again detecting the unfriendly look they exchanged.

Miss Cains complained of the heat of the fire, and wanted to have the chess-table drawn nearer to Sybil, who was at the other end of the room; but Mr. Kennedy misunderstood her, and removed the table still further from the couch where Mr. Dermot and Sybil were sitting. Miss Cains looked scarcely pleased, and Mr. Dermot smiled, leaned back, and at once addressed Sybil in a subdued key, which could not well be heard near the chess-table.

"What ails you — what is it, Sybil? You are an altered girl, you know. You are like the wedding guest in the ballad — some one has told you a tale that has made you sadder and wiser. Do tell me what it is, Sybil?"

Sybil looked up at him, and smiled in proud and sad triumph. She wondered how he would have felt if he knew — she wondered, but scarcely doubted. Could Mr. Dermot — could any man resist the temptation of knowing himself beloved by a girl young, pretty, and whom he had always both liked and admired?

"Do tell me!" he entreated. "I, too, should like to know that wonderful story."

"No one told it to me," replied Sybil, looking at him wistfully.

She felt not the least, not the faintest temptation to enlighten him.

"I could live years in this house with him, and keep my secret," she thought proudly.

"Then you invented it, you little witch. If I were a painter, I would make a picture out of you just now."

"Oh, if he admires me, I am undone," thought Sybil, getting frightened; but Mr. Dermot did not go on with admiration.

"Sybil," he said, a little impatiently, "what did she mean by keeping so close to you all day? Don't let yourself be chaperoned by her, if you please; and, above all, don't make a stranger of your friend."

His friendly look, so frank, so open, excluded both hope and fear. Sybil need never fear Mr. Dermot, for he would never be so near her secret as to guess it; and how could she hope if she feared not?

"No one chaperones me," she began — she did not continue; the door opened, and Narcisse appeared, bringing in a letter for Mr. Kennedy. Mr. Dermot looked up surprised.

"This is not post-time," he said.

"It is not," replied Narcisse; "but the weather has been rough, and the packet was late — so at least the postman told me."

"I believe he is an oyster, though," suggested Mr. Dermot, gravely.

"He is," quite as seriously replied Narcisse, with whom this blessed universe was little better than a receptacle for his favourite Testacea.

In the meanwhile, Mr. Kennedy was reading his letter. Blanche, whose move it was, seemed absorbed in a brown study.

"Dermot," excitedly said Mr. Kennedy.

In a moment, Mr. Dermot, who had been watching him, was by his side. Sybil looked at them both with a beating heart. Something, she did not know what, but something was at hand. Mr. Kennedy held the letter in his hand, and Mr. Dermot, bending over his shoulder, read it. It was brief, but significant, no doubt, for Sybil saw them exchange perplexed looks.

"Where is the *Times*?" asked Mr. Dermot, quickly.

Sybil rose swiftly, and brought it to him. He took it without thanking her. His eye ran rapidly over it; she saw that he singled out the shipping news.

"The *Mountain Fairy* sails to-morrow," he said, eagerly; "I can cross over to-night."

Mr. Kennedy stared.

"There's no packet."

"There are fishing-boats," replied Mr. Dermot, gaily.

"The weather is rough."

"It *has* been rough," decisively said Mr. Dermot; "I do not care about the swell. I have two hours before me," he added, taking out his watch.

Mr. Kennedy looked very grave, but made no further objection. Mr. Dermot's grey eyes sparkled with excitement. Sybil, who stood by him unheeded, felt, with a dull despair, that he was going away — away far from Saint Vincent, heaven alone knew whither, and for how long! She looked at him pitifully, in very dreary earnestness, but he did not see her — he saw nothing then. He took two or three turns about the room, then he left it, and she could hear his quick step going downstairs. Mr. Kennedy,

who still looked very grave, slowly followed him out, and the two girls remained alone. Blanche came up to her friend.

"Sybil," she said, "you have been good, and brave — be so to the last."

"He is going away," replied Sybil, who was ashy pale; "he is going away, Blanche!"

"Never mind, child — he will come back, you know; only, for goodness sake, do not betray yourself!"

"He would not see it, Blanche — he sees nothing — he is too happy to go — did you see that?"

"Oh! yes, I saw it — let him go, then."

"He is going to Canada, Blanche. I know the *Mountain Fairy* sails for Canada. I read it in the *Times*. The Johnsons have failed, or something of the kind, and he is going away."

She spoke in a low, dull voice; she looked the picture of misery. She had wished, she had hoped — for when can love cease to do either? — and hope and desire were wrecked. He was going away — when would he return? — when would he ever care for her now?

"You will break down at the parting," said Miss Cains, anxiously.

"Oh! no," very drearily replied Sybil; "but all is over, Blanche, and — and I suppose I did hope."

She sat down. A few minutes back she had felt almost happy. A few minutes before he had sat by her, looking so kind and so friendly. A few minutes before she had felt as if happiness were within her grasp, if she but chose to seize it; and now, now where was it? She looked at the blank before her in mute

despair. A few hours more, less by far, and Saint Vincent would know him no more — his room would be cold and empty; his voice, his look, his step would be absent, and where was her remedy? Was she his sister, his wife, his betrothed? She was nothing — for ever nothing! She rose with a sudden, sharp cry.

"Blanche, I cannot bear it!" she said. "I cannot bear it!"

As she spoke the door opened, and her father entered the room. His countenance was quite clear and pleasant again.

"Young ladies," he said, "the traveller bade me wish you good-bye for him. He had no time to come himself. Miss Cains, it was your move, I believe."

He sat down to resume the interrupted game of chess, but Sybil would not let him. She twined her arms around his neck with passionate eagerness.

"What is it?" she said. "Have the Johnsons failed? Is he going to Canada? Will he come back? What is it, papa, do tell me, darling?"

Sybil never questioned her father, and Mr. Kennedy never spoke of business matters to his daughter; but he was taken by surprise.

"Yes," he said, "the Johnsons are going all wrong; but Dermot will be there in time, thanks to a friendly warning, and of course he will come back, Pussy."

"When? — when?"

"A year hence, perhaps. Why do you ask?"

"I had something to say to him," vaguely replied Sybil, releasing her hold of Mr. Kennedy.

"Then you must write it," gaily said her father. "Miss Cains, it was your move."

They resumed the interrupted game, and Sybil went and sat alone on the couch where Mr. Dermot had asked her to tell him the tale of the change he saw in her. The tale was told now — told for ever, Sybil felt. He would forget her in other scenes, and that slight hold she had of him would perish in the broad chasm of a year. He was free, and maybe he would seek some other bondage before they met again. Let him! Hope died in Sybil's heart that evening; no slow, lingering agony was hers, with days of health and strength between alternatives of sick despair — but a sudden, violent death, that laid her inanimate and pale in that girlish bosom which had been her brief sanctuary.

Mr. Dermot was gone; he was really gone; there was no reprieve, blessed and unexpected, to that cruel fiat; he was gone, for a telegram came the next morning stating that he had reached the English coast safely.

This was the second great bitterness in Sybil's life; the third was yet to come.

CHAPTER IV.

"FOR goodness sake, Sybil, don't betray yourself, or Mr. Kennedy must see it all," said Miss Cains to Sybil the next morning.

Perhaps Sybil would not have cared much if her father had seen it all, as Blanche said; but she felt no anxiety on that head, for the excellent reason that her father was not in Saint Vincent, and she told her friend so.

"He is gone up the north for a few days."

Miss Cains looked surprised, and scarcely pleased.

"It seems the fashion in this house for people to go away and not bid those who stay behind a good-bye!" she remarked, drily.

"Oh! Blanche, do not think papa meant a slight, pray do not!" earnestly said Sybil.

"Oh! no," carelessly replied Miss Cains. "You do not think he has gone to England about those Thompsons, do you, Sybil?"

"No, he is gone up the north to buy rape-seed, or something of the kind."

Miss Cains looked very thoughtful, and Sybil relapsed into her dull, silent misery. He had crossed over safely on that clear, cold, moonlit night; he had taken the early express train; he was in London by this, maybe on board the *Mountain Fairy*. Sybil had seen the Thames shipping once; she remembered that wonderful scene — the forest of masts, the shooting boats, the glassy water, the hissing steamers, the smoke and fog, and the pale sun gleaming over all; and as

she sat with Blanche Cains mechanically plying her crochet-needle, she was not in the warm drawing-room of Saint Vincent. She stood on the wharf; she saw Mr. Dermot in the wherry which shot from the docks. He talked and laughed with the boatman, he shook his tawny hair, and his grey eye lit, but she could not hear him, she was so far away. The steamer was reached. Strong and agile, he leaped on the deck, and made his way amongst the passengers. Then he went down the narrow stairs to his cabin, and vanished. A bell rang, the deck was cleared of strangers, the steamer made her way midst the multitude of ships and boats around her. Down the broadening Thames she went: the open sea was reached, coasts vanished, and the *Mountain Fairy* moved alone, a solitary speck between sea and sky, soon to be lost in the vast Atlantic.

"I cannot bear it! — I cannot bear it!" cried Sybil again, and she flung her work away, and threw herself sobbing and moaning across the table.

Miss Cains was concerned.

"Now, darling, do not — do not," she said; "do not, there is some one coming."

Sybil looked up, flushed and joyful. Could it be? — was he returning?

"No, no," quickly said Blanche, "this is a lady — a visitor. I do not know her, but I heard her talking to Denise."

Sybil dried her tears, and stood with her back to the light. The drawing-room door opened, and admitted Mrs. Mush. This lady had long ceased to be mentioned in Saint Vincent; Sybil had mentally given her up two months ago, and was taken by surprise on

seeing her. Still, she did her best to conceal this feeling, and welcome her cousin.

"Dear Mrs. Mush," she said, going up to her, "how long you have been coming!"

"No, my dear, I was a very short time; I had a remarkably good passage."

"Oh! but I mean how long this visit of yours has been delayed. We have been expecting you ages."

Mrs. Mush sat down without answering. She had been spending the winter with Mrs. Steele, and had been sick of her life, poor thing! and on Mr. Kennedy's first summons, she had hastened back to the calm and pleasant world of Saint Vincent, and now Sybil reproached her for having delayed her visit so long! It was awkward, but a life of poverty had taught Mrs. Mush the wisdom of not being too frank, so she answered in her light way,

"My dear, if I had come earlier, I should not have been 'finished' by Mrs. Steele. Now I am as perfect as she can make me, and, indeed, I am so improved that you will not know me. But what have you been doing, my poor child? You look quite ill!"

"I have not been well, Mrs. Mush."

Mrs. Mush had heard of Count de Renneville, and kindly laid Sybil's altered looks to his account.

"Oh! that love!" she mentally exclaimed, "that love! Well, my dear," she cheerfully resumed, "I bring news — great news!"

Sybil's heart beat. News! what news could there be save of him? She looked eagerly at Mrs. Mush.

"Yes, great news," resumed Mrs. Mush. "Your aunt, Miss Glyn, has at length accomplished the aim and ambition of her life. She has learned how to

apply capital, and she is setting up on her own account within half an hour's walk of Saint Vincent. Herring curing, butter salting, are to be Miss Glyn's occupation. She has some thousands, you see," added Mrs. Mush with a sigh, for she, poor thing! had but hundreds, "and she naturally wants to get rid of them."

"I am very sorry," said Sybil vaguely.

"Yes, but do not tell her so, my dear. She is delighted. And now, you naughty girl, why do you not introduce me to Miss Cains all this time?"

Sybil looked confused, for Blanche had been sitting aloof with rather an offended air, but she now came forward smiling, and bore unflinchingly Mrs. Mush's keen look. It was a very keen look. It seemed to wish to read Blanche Cains thoroughly; to wish, but scarcely to succeed. The languid blue eyes, the calm smile, the easy grace, baffled Mrs. Mush. So she dropped her scrutinizing gaze, and became chatty and pleasant, whilst Sybil gave a few orders for her reception.

Drearily unwelcome was Mrs. Mush's arrival to the poor girl. For now sorrow had to be locked up in her own breast, a mute and fettered, but rebellious captive.

"Oh! if it were but night," she thought, "if it were but night, and I could cry and moan to my heart's content!"

Poor Sybil! you are young still, very young, and you do not know the silent grief. You want to complain and cry aloud, and you rebel under the social hypocrisy of life — that inexorable law which bids you be still, and tells you to smile, though your heart is aching!

But slow though were its hours, the dreary day did at length go by; Mrs. Mush's fluent talk, Blanche's easy gaiety, were both silent now, and Sybil was once more alone. Then, in the silence of her room, did the poor child's heart at length find a sort of dreary peace. It found more. When, after kneeling and praying, her tears had ceased to flow, and when with them the bitterness of her sorrow had partly passed away, Sybil's pride and her conscience awoke. What was this grief for a man who did not love her? Why were these tears shed for one whose kind, careless smile of wonder she could imagine and feel, even in the solitude of her room? He did not love her — he never would love her now. She had had a chance, and that chance was gone; was she therefore to sit lamenting till his return? She must not, and she would not. She remembered the cold, reproving glance of Blanche Cains as they had parted this evening, and she could not bear to feel that she had deserved the censure of that look. Blanche was not asleep yet, and Sybil would go and tell her that if she had been weak, she was brave and strong again.

Miss Cains was gently falling asleep when her room door opened softly, a step crossed the floor and stopped at her bedside, and a voice said almost in her ear: "Blanche, are you sleeping?"

She started up, and saw Sybil standing by her side, a candle in one hand — the other held back the bed-curtain.

"Now," coolly said Miss Cains, "you want but a dove on your shoulder to be Lord Lyttleton's ghost!"

"I am a ghost," replied Sybil, in a sad, low voice; "for I come from another world, Blanche. I

could not sleep without telling you so. You need never look at me again as you looked this evening — never!”

Miss Cains seemed perplexed.

“What does it mean, Sybil?” she asked. “You know I often do not understand you — what does it mean?”

Sybil had put down her light — she clasped her hands with passionate fervour.

“It means,” she said, “that I have asked God to help me, and that he is helping me fast, Blanche. It means that I love Mr. Dermot beyond my life, beyond anything mortal, but that I will conquer that love and prevail over it, if it be in a woman’s heart and power to do so! Never look at me again as you looked this evening — never, Blanche!”

Miss Cains sank back on her pillow.

“It is no use,” she half sighed; “all that is beyond me — how you can love him, is beyond me — and how, adoring him as you do, you can try and give him up, is beyond me too.”

“What would you do, Blanche?” asked Sybil in simple wonder.

“Why, I’d have him!” coolly replied her friend. “Let him go to Canada? Not I. He should stay here, Sybil, and tremble to let *me* out of his sight. There never was a thing I wished for I did not get; and, if that thing happened to be Green Eyes, why, I should have it too.”

Sybil’s lids fell — she blushed deeply.

“I see you are quite shocked,” said Miss Cains; “but remember, my dear, that, luckily for decorum’s sake, my fancies do not run that way. I defy any

man to say that I ever adored *him* — and, oh! if I were you, how I would hate that cold Mr. Dermot, who could live in this house so long and not fall desperately in love with you!”

She clenched her small hands as she spoke, and as she sat up in bed, her golden hair flowing around her fair face, her eyes fixed in scorn, her lips compressed, Miss Cains looked a terrible young beauty.

“No, you do not understand me,” said Sybil, with a bright wondering smile; “not at all, Blanche. I would die first. Of course I could have had that sort of liking from Mr. Dermot. It would have been sadly easy,” she added, with a pretty curling lip; “for I am sure he falls in love very readily.”

Blanche coloured steadily.

“Indeed!” she said, with some scorn.

“Oh! yes,” calmly resumed Sybil; “and he admires me, too, in a sort of way, at least; but, Blanche, I would hate that. The liking I would have, if I could have any, is the liking he could not help, which would come to him, and conquer him, and humble him — as I have been humbled — not that which, by seeking, I could give him. What!” she added, her clear voice ringing, and her dark eyes flashing, “what! do I love him so, that it seemed this evening like tearing my heart-strings asunder to try and prevail over that love? — and shall I be liked a few days because I have dark eyes and a pretty face! Blanche, it would be the deepest abasement and humiliation.”

Miss Cains did not answer at once; she sat with her cheek on her hand, and her eyes full on Sybil's glowing face and bright eyes.

"I envy you," she said at length — "yes, you may look amazed, but I envy you; happy girl, to turn evil into good — sorrow into a blessing!"

"Happy girl!" said Sybil, with the tears rushing to her eyes — "happy girl, did you say? Oh! Blanche, if you knew! — if you but knew!"

She turned her face away, for she would have had no one read there the bitterness of her heart. Oh! how that heart ached at what might have been, and must never be! — how it repined over inevitable fate! Oh! if she could — if she but could have changed lots with that unknown future rival! — perhaps some poor struggling girl, who had never worn a silk dress, who had not a shilling for her dowry, and whom Mr. Dermot would probably love ere they met again.

"Yes, of course, if I knew," said Miss Cains, a little impatiently; "but as you do not tell me, I do not know."

"And I will not — must not tell you," said Sybil, firmly; "if I wish to prevail, and conquer myself, I must be silent. I must forget, and not think — not speak. Henceforth, Blanche, his name is that of a stranger — let him stay away, wed whom he will, love whom he pleases, I care not, because I must not care — I have no right. It would be wicked — it would be wrong."

Her voice faltered a little as she said the last word. She shook, too — it might be with nervousness, or with cold.

"You are shivering," said Blanche — "I should not have kept you there so long. Undress, and come in to me, will you?"

"Yes, I will," said Sybil, eagerly; "I am not so

brave as I look. I want comfort, and consolation, Blanche."

"Of course, you do, my poor little white dove," softly said Miss Cains — "of course you do."

Sybil slipped off her clothes, and softly crept in to her friend. She was shivering still, and the fond and warm embrace that received her did her good. At first she cried bitterly, then she sobbed a little; and when both sobs and weeping were over, she kissed Blanche, and blessed her, and softly fell asleep.

But dreary, long, and bitter, and wakeful, was that night to Blanche Cains. Sybil, without knowing it, had stung her to the heart; she had stirred up those dark waters, which sleep in many human lives, till a word, a look, an allusion, bring them up to the surface, and with them a dreary past, or a sullen future.

CHAPTER V.

WEARIED with grief and weeping, Sybil slept both late and soundly. When she awoke Blanche was standing by her side dressed, and looking so brilliant, and so gay, and so handsome, that Sybil was fairly dazzled.

"Well, Miss Kennedy," said Blanche, airily, "what do you bring back to us poor mortals from the ivory gates?"

"Blanche, you are splendidly handsome," was Sybil's grave reply.

"Am I?"

"You are; you look triumphant and happy — quite glorious?"

Miss Cains looked at herself in the glass with calm complacency. "Yes, she was not amiss, and she confessed it; but it was time for Sybil to rise — would she do so, and let her friend help her to dress?"

Sybil accepted the offer. The morning was calm and grey. The last frost had melted from the earth, and spring was at hand. The wind was so soft — a balmy breeze, just strong enough to dry the humid soil, but impotent to check the young life that longed to come forth once more.

In all, save its promise of renewed life, Sybil was like that day. She was calm and mild, and she looked as if the season of her tears had gone by, but the gladness and the joy of spring were not with her. You might have found these, indeed, in the countenance of Miss Cains. The roses on her cheeks could have vied with any that ever blew. Stars were not brighter than her eyes, and as for her mirth, it was mischievous and gleeful — "kittenish," said Sybil.

"I cannot help it," said Miss Cains, shaking her handsome head. "I do not know when I have felt so light, and so gay. I hope nothing is going to happen — I mean nothing sad," she added a little gravely; "that would be a cruel wakening, would it not, Sybil?"

The words were scarcely uttered, when Denise entered the dining-room, where the two girls waited for Mrs. Mush. She brought a letter for Blanche. Miss Cains looked nervous, and turned pale as she took it, and turned it in her hand.

"'Tis from England," she said; "and I do believe it brings bad tidings. Denise looked like fate, did she not?"

"Read it, Blanche."

"Why, so I will, only I like to speculate first. I wonder what it is about. Is my aunt dead, and has she left me her long-promised inheritance? Why, no — there is no black seal to the envelope, you see. Then I suppose it is from some kind friend or other, offering me a situation of thirty pounds a year. Yes, it must be that."

Sybil wound her arms around the neck of her friend.

"You'll not take it, you know! — you'll never leave me?"

"Of course not — not even if you marry," replied Miss Cains, with some little bitterness in her tone.

Sybil's thoughts flew to the ship that was now tossing on the great ocean, and a cloud came over her face.

"I shall never marry," she said.

"Well, but suppose I do," said Miss Cains. "It is not likely, I grant; but still the man may be found who will be insane enough to take me."

"Then if you marry," softly said Sybil, "I shall take a house near you, and help to rear and pet your children, my darling. But pray do read the letter."

Miss Cains tore the seal open, and did read the letter, and that twice over; after which she handed it to Sybil, and went to the window, and stood looking out on the garden, with her back turned to her friend.

Sybil, too, read the letter twice, but once sufficed to master its contents. It was from a cousin of Miss Cains, and apprized her that their aunt, Miss Mary

Cains, was lying dangerously ill, and urgently requested her presence. Beyond this the letter said little. The writer, it was plain, expected compliance, for she only spoke of not delaying.

Sybil's heart fell.

"You must go," she said.

"Tell me to stay, and I will!" cried Blanche, embracing her fondly.

"You must go!" said Sybil again; "but, oh! Blanche, when will you come back?"

"Ah, there it is — once I go, I am not free; but my darling, I will do my best, I will."

"I know you will," said Sybil, "and I suppose you must go at once."

"Oh! not to-day," replied Miss Cains.

Not to-day meant to-morrow. It was scarcely in Sybil's power to hide her distress. This second parting within so short a time grieved and saddened her inexpressibly; but she was too generous not to struggle against feelings which could only add to her friend's distress, so she smiled bravely in her face, and said with a sort of cheerfulness,

"Tell me how I can help you."

"Well, dear, you must come up to my room, and we shall see."

They did go up to Miss Cains's room, and ere long her trunk was emptied on the floor, and Sybil's arms were heaped with the materials of a good day's work.

"It is a shame, it is!" said Miss Cains remorsefully, "to make you slave so; but you see I shall have no time at Aunt Cains' — shall I?"

"Of course not — besides, it makes me happy, Blanche, to work for you."

"I do believe it does," said Miss Cains, her blue eyes glistening, "I do believe that of all good generous devoted little creatures you are peer. But I shall help you, you know," she added, reverting to the question of work. "Shall we sit up here or go down to the drawing-room? We could soon put it out of sight, you know."

"Let us sit up here," said Sybil. "Denise shall make us a fire."

"And Mrs. Mush will not be prying," said Blanche. "I prefer it."

The whole of that day, therefore, they sat together in Miss Cains's room, and Sybil worked for her friend, who was too restless herself to ply her needle very assiduously. Twenty times she took up her task, and flung it down again with some impatient word, and all the time Sybil sewed steadily on, till dusk came, and compelled her to leave off.

"And now," she said, as she folded up her work, "do come and sit by me, Blanche, and let us have a chat."

"We must go down," said Blanche, "or Mrs. Mush will be offended."

"Mrs. Mush does not get offended," impatiently said Sybil.

"My darling, Mrs. Mush is one of the powers that be, do not let me alienate her if you wish me to return."

Sybil yielded with a reluctant sigh. Why was she to be deprived of this her last evening? Mrs. Mush was very brilliant, but unsupportable was her brilliancy

to Sybil. As Miss Cains's departure drew near, it took gloomy proportions, and also became an event of strange magnitude. She had felt Mr. Dermot's departure more deeply, but not in the same way. By going he had only set the seal on an inevitable separation. This journey which Blanche was going to take seemed, on the contrary, the herald of some unknown calamity. What if Miss Mary Cains had a lingering illness, and insisted on keeping her beloved niece! Could Blanche resist, or Sybil complain? And if she stayed away, what was Sybil's life after this?

Very dreary, therefore, was this separation; everything, indeed, was dreary now in Sybil's life. Everything bore the mien of a calamity, and came in the shape and aspect of a woe. Happiness is too often like a string of orient pearls — the aggregate of precious units; but break the silken thread that binds them, and they roll away, scattered by the pitiless hand of Fate, never more to be gathered and worn by the happy wearer. Thus it now seemed to fare with Sybil. The precious thread — as precious as any Lachesis ever spun, or Atropos ever tore asunder — was broken, and one by one her pearls left her, poor, forsaken, and alone. Thus, at least, she deemed it, darkening her lot by voluntary exaggeration, as is the fashion of the young.

Miss Cains was to leave the next morning, so she retired early, in order to lose none of her slumbers. But Sybil could not sleep, her heart was too full; besides, the wind was moaning fearfully. A gale had risen with sunset, and now lorded it with might and main. It was a terrible night at sea. Ah! how did it

fare with the *Mountain Fairy*? Miss Cains quarrelled with Sybil's pale face when she came down.

"You have not been sleeping?" she said severely.

"No, I could not for the wind — for the gale, I should say."

"I heard nothing. Was it a gale?"

Miss Cains could put the question, for the morning was remarkably calm.

"Yes, it was a gale," said Sybil.

"I suppose there will be a swell," said Miss Cains with a little shiver, "and I always am so ill."

She gave her breakfast cup a forlorn look, that made Mrs. Mush laugh.

"Indeed, Mrs. Mush," ruefully said Blanche, "I consider this no joke. I suffer mental agonies on board — not physical, mind — but mental. Visions of suicide haunt me — now, that is not pleasant, is it?"

"Not exactly, my dear; but take your breakfast all the same."

"Yes," said Miss Cains philosophically, "of course I must. And after breakfast comes the parting, eh! Sybil?"

This was spoken with a little sigh; but Sybil could not sigh — her heart was too full for this relief.

Breakfast was scarcely over, when the ladies were informed that the carriage which was to convey Miss Cains away was at the door. There had been some talk of Sybil and Mrs. Mush accompanying her, but this Blanche successfully resisted. The distance was too great, and Sybil had a slight cold — she would not hear of it, and her will at length prevailed.

"I suppose it is time for me to go," said Miss Cains, rising.

Sybil rose too.

"Let us have a turn in the garden first," she said.

Blanche nodded assent, and they went out together arm-in-arm. The morning was mild, but dull and cheerless. The sun was hidden in grey clouds, and now and then shot forth a cold, lūrid ray, that vanished almost as soon as seen. The garden paths were strewn with tokens of the night's tempest. Young green branches, that would never bud forth into leaf, shrubs that had been stripped and scattered by the wind, met them on every side; but saddest of all was a shattered nest, around which a bird flew with a plaintive cry and fluttering wings. The young unfledged bird had been killed by the fall which had spared the parent.

Sybil felt sick and faint, and turned away with a shudder. Even Miss Cains, albeit not a sensitive young lady, said, nervously,

"I wish that bird would not scream so."

"Is it an omen?" said Sybil, in a low voice.

"Nonsense! An omen of what?"

Sybil did not answer. They had walked to the end of the garden and back, and reached the house once more.

"Let us take another turn," she said, "you have time enough."

Blanche looked at her watch, and said yes, she had time. When they had once more reached the end of the garden, Sybil spoke.

"I don't know why I feel this parting so terribly, Blanche. I know you will come back — and yet there is something that dins and murmurs in my ear that you will not."

"Shall I take a vow?" asked Miss Cains, with much gravity. "Vows, you know, do what nothing else can."

Sybil shook her head.

"No, that will not do," she said; "the vow could only bind your will, which I do not doubt. It does not bind Fate, or, to speak in more Christian fashion, circumstances."

They had reached the house again, and Sybil looked at it with strange, wistful eyes.

"Oh! if I could keep you there," she said, passionately. "If I could be sure of you in these four walls!"

Blanche was moved, and stooping, kissed the flushed face that was half raised to hers.

"I do not think there ever was a friendship like ours," cried Sybil, ardently; "was there, Blanche? I am sure it is beyond the love of sisters! Oh! yes, far beyond it. Oh! if I were but my own mistress we should never part. Blanche, we shall live together when I am of age, and you shall be the fair one, and I the dark one, for we shall dress alike."

Blanche laughed.

"If you laugh I shall get affronted!" said Sybil, a little hotly.

"Which heaven forbid! And now, my dear, shall we not part?"

Sybil frowned, and despotically replied,

"No."

"Well, but what shall we do, dear?"

"Take another turn, and then we shall see."

Miss Cains looked at her watch again.

"Why do you look at your watch?" jealously asked Sybil.

"To see the time."

"You are in a mighty hurry to leave me."

"No, dear, but Time is. We shall take another turn, however."

Again they went to the end of the garden; but Sybil's tears flowed the whole time.

"Ah!" said Blanche, "we should have parted at once."

"Yes," replied Sybil, "we should indeed."

When they reached the house again, they entered it, went through the cloister, and came out at the gates where the carriage was waiting.

"And now we part!" said Miss Cains, hurriedly. "Good-bye, Mrs. Mush; good-bye, Sybil — give me a kiss, and let it be over!"

"Yes, now we part — and we part for ever!" sobbed Sybil. "Shall I, must I never see you again, Blanche? Oh! why — why do you leave me?"

She spoke in piteous accents, she clung to her friend with a convulsive and entreating embrace.

Miss Cains turned ashy pale, and averted her face, and trembling, tried to disengage herself.

"Mrs. Mush, take her away," she implored. "Come, darling, let me go. I tell you that unless I die I will come back to you. There, one kiss, and good-bye."

Mrs. Mush came forward and gently separated them. Indeed, Sybil, though weeping pitifully, offered no resistance. Miss Cains hurried into the carriage, and shut the door quickly, but at once looked out at Sybil. Raising her veil, she showed her once more the fair face she loved so dearly, and Sybil, looking at it, thought:

"I shall never see her again! — never!"

That sad little word still echoed in her heart as the carriage drove away. And who knows, Sybil, perhaps, you have indeed seen your last of the friend of your youth? Perhaps something more cruel than death — more pitiless than space or time — shall henceforth divide you!

CHAPTER VI.

ON the very day of Miss Cains's departure from Saint Vincent, Miss Glyn came and took possession of her new home, and sent word to her cousin and her niece that she should be very happy to see them. Sybil, who was languidly sitting with a book in her lap, and her feet on the fender, looked up, and seemed interested.

"Let us go and see aunt to-day, Mrs. Mush," she said.

Mrs. Mush asked for no better, so they got ready, and went. A beautiful, solitary road, passing between stately oaks, with wild-looking slopes on either side, where sheep were scattered midst the furze, led them to the lonely brick house which Miss Glyn had elected for her home. About this dwelling itself there was no beauty; its garden was rude and old-fashioned, but the savage look of the surrounding landscape half charmed, half awed Sybil's heart. A long, lonely moor, a brawling river, tumbling rudely midst rocks and stones, and in the distance some Celtic ruins, which, Sybil knew well, bounded Miss Glyn's horizon. It was a strange place for business, to say the least of it.

Miss Glyn came forth to meet them.

"I am glad to see you, Mrs. Mush," she said, with a certain formality — "why, Sybil, how pale you are!"

"Miss Cains went off this morning," replied Sybil, with a quivering lip — "her aunt is very ill."

"I am heartily glad of it!" said Miss Glyn, not taking time to think to which portion of Sybil's speech her answer grammatically referred — "I never was better pleased in my life; and I hope Miss Cains will never enter my brother-in-law's house again!"

Tears rushed to Sybil's eyes, and she uttered a reproachful, "Oh! aunt."

"Well, my dear," recklessly said Miss Glyn, "that is my way — I never get over a dislike — never!"

There was a candid want of reasoning in this declaration, which mollified Sybil. Of course, if her aunt invoked prejudice, and took her stand thereon, argument was at an end. So she did her best to forgive Miss Glyn's want of reason, and at once changed the subject by looking around the half-empty parlour in which they stood, and saying, with a sigh:

"How unsettled you are still!"

"My dear, I am in my element; you have not seen my counting-house, have you? — why, of course not; come this way — I saw to that first."

She led them into the next apartment; a high desk, a high stool, a bureau, with formidable drawers, ledgers, inkstands, and all the appurtenances of business, graced this room, which Miss Glyn surveyed with infinite complacency.

"This is my *boudoir*," she said, "and here, Sybil, you will find me at my fancy work whenever you come to see me."

Sybil looked dismayed.

"Aunt," she cried, "what are you going to do?"

"My dear, it would be no use telling you — you have no sort of talent for business; even Mrs. Mush will not be affronted if I say that business is not in her way."

Mrs. Mush, who looked unusually grave and pensive, nodded, as much as to say, Oh! of course not; but not one word did she utter.

"You see," resumed Miss Glyn, who was itching to tell them all the time, "the mistake of modern commerce is unity; we shall never be right till we go back to the plan of the middle ages, when merchants were princes; they ruled cities, they were ambassadors — they were virtually masters of Europe. Now all that is altered, thanks, I firmly believe, to the combined action of bankers and the aristocracy. The bankers have got the power — I mean the moneyed power — which belongs to commerce, and not to them. What is a banker? — just tell me that. A banker is a thief," added Miss Glyn, with sudden energy; "he makes money, and does not earn it — his fortune does not mean honest labour; but I am taking you beyond your depth," she added, with a calm smile at her own absurdity — "however, this you can understand: I mean to deal not in one thing, but in many things. Rape-seed I shall grow and sell; herrings I shall cure and sell, too; and butter I shall salt and sell; and I shall deal in that not appreciated, though most invaluable manure, sea-weed. We import guano," added Miss Glyn, with great contempt, "and we neglect one of the most powerful fertilising agents, sea-weed — absurd!"

Sybil looked at her aunt, then at Mrs. Mush, who was looking more and more grave, and she knew not

what to think, much less what to say, so she was silent.

"Suppose we have a cup of tea here?" suggested Miss Glyn, who was evidently smitten with the charms of her counting-house — "yes, we will. Rose, bring the tea-things here."

The order was obeyed, and a most comfortless meal, to Sybil's seeming, followed. The tea, the cream, the toast, were excellent indeed, but Miss Kennedy felt frozen out of all cheerfulness by these tall ledgers, and that grim desk, and that deep-looking *bureau*. Mrs. Mush's silence, too, struck her as something ominous and strange, and she was glad when evening came, and her companion, rising, said it was time for them to be going. Miss Glyn did not detain them. It was plain that her mind was too full of business for hospitality to rule it.

"My dear," she said to Sybil, as she gave her a parting kiss, "you must not come to me for a week, please. After that time I shall be very glad to see you; but until then I shall be too busy to see anybody — so good night, and good-bye."

"Good night, aunt," said Sybil, rather hurt. Indeed, she was so far displeased, that she spoke to Mrs. Mush on the subject.

"Now that is unkind of aunt," she said, warmly; "I should have liked to be of use to her, and she treats me like a stranger."

"Poor Miss Glyn!" said Mrs. Mush, very sadly — "did you hear her? — why, Sybil, she is going straight on to ruin — rushing upon it. And the worst is, that if one were to say a word to her, she would only rush the faster."

"Then — then you think her business will not do?" faltered Sybil.

"Think! — I am sure of it, child; but there is no help for it."

At first Sybil was much troubled, then it occurred to her that Mrs. Mush might be mistaken, then, with the lightness of youth for all that concerns business, she drove the subject from her mind, and reverted to her own weighty troubles. She had little else to think of that whole week, for Miss Cains did not keep her promise, or, at least, no letter from her cheered Sybil. Mr. Kennedy never wrote, so Sybil had little else to think of besides her loss, and Blanche's strange silence.

At the end of the week assigned by Miss Glyn, that lady sent a message to Mrs. Mush, requiring her presence that same evening, and exonerating Sybil from coming. Mrs. Mush, who had heard that Rose, Miss Glyn's maid, was strongly suspected of a flirtation, guessed why she was wanted, and why Sybil was not, and answered Sybil's perplexed look of inquiry with a mysterious smile.

"But why must I stay?" asked Sybil — "I feel so dull, Mrs. Mush."

"My dear, your aunt is a most discreet person — moreover, she is convinced you are a mere baby, so you must remain behind."

"Very well," said Sybil, sadly.

"I shall not be long," promised Mrs. Mush, and away she went.

But promises not to be long seem made to be broken. There was much to say in Mrs. Mush's favour. She found Miss Glyn in a towering rage in the counting-house, sitting on the high stool, now converted

into a judicial bench, and the delinquent Rose standing in tears before her. It was a flirtation — it was worse, said Miss Glyn; Mrs. Mush hoped not, and questioned Rose, and tried to calm her mistress; and still time passed, and Sybil remained alone.

There are days and hours when solitude is a burden and a pain. Other days there are, indeed, when there is enchantment in her aspect. Days of hope or desire, when the green wood, the wild shore, the barren heath, or the misty mountain side are a delight and a passion, when the dearest presence brings weariness, and no voice is so sweet as the silence through which nature speaks. But, as we said, there are also days and hours when solitude is a trouble and a torment, and such a day and such an hour were these to Sybil.

Soon after Mrs. Mush left it began to rain; no drizzle was this, but a long sustained shower, that beat against the window-panes, and made Sybil feel nervous and miserable. She rose to close the shutters herself; as she opened the window, a gust of stormy wind came in, covering her face with rain, and she caught a glimpse of a drenched landscape, gleaming wet, and shivering through the dark night. Then it vanished, for as she undid the hasp, the shutters flew to with a crash, and Sybil hastily closed the window and went back to the fire. She felt very wretched, and the voices of the servants laughing in the kitchen below, added to her misery. They were gay and happy, and Sybil envied them.

"I wish Mrs. Mush would come back," she thought querulously.

She took up a book, but she could not read; she

took up her work, but she could not sew. So she sat listlessly and looked at the fire. But as she sat by that lonely hearth, the little mistress of the house felt that she was not meant for solitude. Her heart ached at all these vacant places which she saw and filled up with her mind's eye. Here her aunt, her father, Mr. Dermot, and Blanche had sat together, or in turns; and now they were gone, scattered, to meet no more, perhaps, and no one wrote to her, and she felt wretched, indeed.

"And yet that is my lot," thought Sybil sadly, "for of course I shall not marry, so I shall grow old alone; but perhaps dear Blanche will not marry either. And then we could be together — two old maids, but not unamiable or censorious."

Another thought followed on this — Sybil saw a stormy sea, a ship tossed by the seething waves; then she started up trembling with grief and pain, and, to drown the sound of the gusty wind, she went to her piano, opened it, and played the merriest Irish tune she could think of. But there is always a plaintive note in the gayest Irish music — a sound of lament which easily deepens into a wail. This Irish air, though merry, was wild, and wildness is akin to sorrow. Every time Sybil came back to his sad note, she lingered over it, until it swelled into a dirge so sad and lamentable, that she rose frightened, and would play no more. As she turned from the instrument, she stood still, mute, breathless, awestruck. The door which she faced had opened, and, standing on its threshold, with the gloom behind him, she saw Mr. Dermot. He was haggard and pale, and dripping, as if the sea-waves had that moment cast him forth.

Never did Sybil forget the passionate joy of that moment. At a glance she saw it all. Mr. Dermot was not gone — he was not going. He had come back once more. She sprang towards him, welcome in her whole aspect.

"Oh! I am glad, very glad to see you!" she cried.

Her eyes beamed, her lips quivered, and her flushed face was radiant with happiness and delight. All this Mr. Dermot saw, but vaguely and coldly. He went to the fire, took a chair, and began drying himself.

"Are you — are you ill?" faltered Sybil, frightened at his face.

"No, thank you — only wet."

"You are not going away again?" she half-whispered.

Their eyes met. He was struck with her breathless look, but he did not understand it.

"No," he replied, gravely — "I am not."

Joy, tumultuous in its excess, filled Sybil's heart. She forgot her struggles, her boasted victory, now lost for ever; she was only conscious of exquisite bliss; but she did not dare to speak — she looked at the fire, and tried to still the beatings of her heart. A few minutes passed thus. When Sybil shyly looked up at Mr. Dermot, she was struck with the settled gloom of his looks. Suddenly her great joy was stilled, and slowly her heart sank within her as she watched him. There was something in that rigid countenance which her thoughts called "ominous." An omen means a sign of good or of evil, but custom prefers the sad significance of this word to its happier meaning. It did not occur to Sybil that Mr. Dermot was the bearer of happy

tidings. She read trouble and woe in the look of his grey eye, and every time he moved, or seemed about to speak, her heart leaped up within her.

"I thought — we thought you were gone to Canada," she said at length.

"I was to go, but I shall not go now."

Sybil turned crimson, and looked down, and again felt that she was trembling with guilty joy at this confirmation; but he made a motion. She thought he was going to speak, and up jumped her heart again. He was silent, and Sybil's emotion subsided. Perhaps nothing had happened, after all!

"You are very wet," she said, timidly — "it is raining hard."

He shivered as he bent over the fire, and Sybil thought that he looked very cold and ill.

"Pray take something hot," she said, with her hand on the bell, but his hand laid on her arm checked her.

Sybil started. Mr. Dermot looked very cold, but his hand felt like hot iron through her muslin sleeve.

"You are feverish," she said.

"I believe I am, but that is nothing."

Sybil felt sick and faint. If that was nothing, there was something then. She trembled, and almost longed to cry: "Tell me all — I know it is dreadful, but tell me all at once."

And it was as if Mr. Dermot read the meaning of her anxious face and wistful eye, for he looked at her in a way so sad, so penetrating, and so strange, that Sybil's full heart overflowed.

"Oh! what is it, Mr. Dermot?" she entreated — "oh! tell me, what is it?"

"I bring sad news, Sybil."

Sybil rose to her feet, and clasped her hands wildly.

"My father is ill?" she cried, and her look added — "he is dead."

Mr. Dermot understood her, for he replied quickly:

"He is alive — and well," he added, after a pause.

A deep sigh showed Sybil's relief.

"No, it is not that," resumed Mr. Dermot, recalling her to the bad tidings she had forgotten.

Sybil sat down again, sobered at once.

"He has lost money — he is insolvent, perhaps?" and her voice faltered as there passed before her the dismal and ghastly spectre, doubly drear to a merchant's daughter of commercial ruin.

"No, Sybil, it is not that either," sadly said Mr. Dermot; "it is worse — far worse for you."

Was her father guilty? She gave him a scared look.

"Mr. Dermot," she said, nervously turning and twisting her little fingers together, "you torture me — better kill me, and put me out of my pain."

"I will, Sybil — your father is married."

"Married!" she said, half smiling — "married?"

Stupor was her first feeling. Then she remembered the fondness, the caresses, the adoration which had been hers for years — all rushed back to her in one moment, and with them the thought of this strange woman, now standing for ever between her and her father's love. She raised her hands to her face, and cried till the tears ran through her fingers. Mr. Dermot let her weep unchecked. Those tears would do her

good, and he knew it. He let her weep, and all the time he looked at the fire with a gloomy, forbidding stare.

"Married!" at length said Sybil, looking up. "Mr. Dermot, have you said it — have I heard you rightly? I thought you were gone to Canada — is it true that you are sitting there talking to me?"

"It is true," he replied, "and it is true that your father is married; and you will need a friend, my poor little Sybil, and friend and brother I will be to you."

He stretched forth his hand, as if to draw her to his side and shield her from some unknown danger. But Sybil drew back, and started to her feet, frightened, pale, and breathless.

"There is more," she cried; "tell me all — tell me all!"

"Ay, there is more indeed," said he, rising and standing before her. "You did not ask who was your father's wife?"

"No," she answered faintly. "Tell me."

"Blanche Cains."

Sybil's eyes flashed; she drew herself up.

"That's not true," she cried; "you always hated her, and now you slander her, Mr. Dermot. It is not true."

Sybil looked very handsome as she stood thus and there — flushed, brilliant, and indignant. But little cared Mr. Dermot for any woman's beauty then.

"'Tis true," he said doggedly, and with a look so severe and stern, that it carried conviction with it.

Sybil felt that her blood turned cold and curdled within her. The shock which her lover's treachery

had begun was consummated by this deeper and darker treason of her friend. Something then died within her which was to know no second birth — a faith, a trust, a belief in others, which there once had been, and which were to be no more. She looked at Mr. Dermot with tearless eyes and quivering lips, but she saw him not. She saw nothing but the wreck and miserable ruin of the great passion of her life. Her friend was perfidious. The heart of her heart was untrue. Her second self was false to its other half. The world was at an end — for this treason of a friend filled it with the trouble, confusion, and utter darkness of earth's awful days.

"But it cannot be!" she cried, rallying suddenly with a flash of hope; "he disliked Blanche, you know he did — he could not bear her."

"He disliked her, did he!" said Mr. Dermot with a stern smile; "and he left this house to marry her, and she joined him ten days back to marry him. Oh! yes, he hated her, Sybil, and I have no doubt she hated him too."

He laughed. But Sybil's arms fell down loosely by her side. Her tears could not flow now, but when she read the past, when she saw in it how these two, her father and her friend, had united to deceive her fond, faithful trust, she felt a passion of despair, which found its vent in words.

"And so it was all false!" she cried, "all false. He liked her all along, and all along, too, she whom I loved as I loved my life, meant to supplant me in my father's love. I took her in, poor and forsaken; I defended her against everyone and everything, and

she meant to betray me, and she is now my father's wife, and the mistress of this house."

"And she will wear satin, and velvet, and diamonds," said Mr. Dermot with a curling lip, "and think what a little foolish Sybil that was who gave her the chance and let her in!"

Sybil had thrown herself on the sofa and buried her face in its velvet cushion; she now looked up, with eyes that burned angrily in her pale face. She was in that mood of grief, one of its bitterest, when the heart scorns the relief of tears and lamentations, and longs for revenge, which oftener falls on the innocent than on the guilty.

"Yes, you triumph over me," she cried, "for you hated her as much as I loved her, and that is why you came here to give me this stab, and to laugh at me in my misery. Triumph if you will. What is it to you if she has deceived me? — what is it to you if she is my father's wife, and, as you say, will wear velvet and diamonds?"

Her looks — her tone stung him. Anger, steady and sure, not fitful, like hers, rose to his brow, and settled there.

"You ask what it is to me, Miss Kennedy," he replied — "why, simply this: she was your friend, but she was my mistress, honoured and beloved. She is your father's wife — she was to have been mine."

Sybil turned ashy pale. In one moment memory brought back a host of images so shameful, so humiliating, so tormenting, that she could have died gladly to escape them. Oh! insupportable remembrance, it was the lover of Blanche Cains that she had loved! — it was to his mistress that she had told it! — it was

in her arms that she had sobbed her grief to sleep! Sybil turned wild and desperate.

"Do you want to kill me?" she cried. "What have I done to you that you should treat me so? — what have I done?"

"And what have I done?" he asked, indignantly. "I am the bearer, not the author, of evil tidings; you questioned my right to call to account this most perfidious of women, and I told you the right she herself gave me three years back. How and why does this offend you?"

"True," bitterly said Sybil — "why should the falsehood, dissembling and treachery, which have for the last year surrounded me, offend me? My father's conduct I will not censure — he is my father, after all, and not accountable to his child. But you will allow me to ask why you, sir, who entered this house under an assumed character, also chose to be so silent concerning the relation in which you stood to my father's guest, and my friend!"

She spoke in a bitter, taunting tone, that stung him to the quick.

"Miss Kennedy," he said, trying to curb down his anger, but the thick veins in his forehead swelling, "you have no practical experience of life, and I suppose I must excuse you. A man scarcely takes a girl for his confidant in these matters."

"Do you mean to say that I wanted to be yours?" cried Sybil, firing with indignation — "who asked for your confidence? But were you not bound to tell my father? — you were, sir — you know you were!"

"I repeat it, Miss Kennedy, you have no practical

experience of life. Was this secret mine only? — it was a woman's, and, therefore, doubly sacred."

"Then why do you tell it now?" asked Sybil — "I can tell you why, Mr. Dermot — to serve your revenge, not to serve me."

Mr. Dermot looked at her in indignant amazement.

"You are an ungrateful girl," he said, losing all patience, "and I should have left you to your fate. If I come back to this house, Sybil, it is to guard you; and if I were not here, your banishment would be her first act."

"Then she would be more merciful than you are, Mr. Dermot," bitterly said Sybil. "I dare say she knows there are torments beyond endurance."

She spoke in a tone of such misery, that his heart relented once more towards her. Cruel, unjust, stinging as she had been, he pitied her again, and again approached her with words of comfort.

"Sybil," he said, "do not be so, my child; let one wrong bind us more closely — let her treachery to us both give each a friend."

He spoke very kindly, but with a calmness beyond Sybil's comprehension.

"Ah! how can you bear it?" she cried — "how can you bear it? — for, after all, you loved her."

"No," he said, his eyes kindling with much scorn — "I loved a great, good, and generous woman, incapable of meanness, and fraud, and perjury, but I never loved Blanche Cains."

"And she is my father's wife?" resumed Sybil, coming back to that bitter thought — "my father's wife — and what am I?"

She sank down on a chair with a look full of

woe. Mr. Dermot sat down by her, and took her hand.

"Sybil," he said, in a low tone, "I will be true to you — true as death — life is too false to swear by."

Sybil was ashamed of the sudden flood of joy his words and looks brought to her heart. She scorned herself and that love against which she ever strove in vain; that weakness which even in this bitter hour made her feel glad to sit thus by him, receiving this stranger's friendship. Suddenly she turned pale as death.

"Mr. Dermot," she said, trembling with passionate emotion, "tell me this. Did she ever betray me to you — tell you anything — anything, in short —"

She looked at him with such scared eyes that he was amazed.

"Tell me anything!" he replied. "Why, no, Sybil, how could she? We had no private interviews."

"Never?" said Sybil, relieved.

Mr. Dermot smiled.

"Never is too rigid," he said. "You remember the little wood near the mill where you found me? I was waiting for her — on the day when her head ached. You remember, too, the seaweed. Well, I had seen her that morning, and your suspicion was a true one; but, Sybil, you know how I felt then, and you may guess how she felt too. No fond, foolish lovers were we, but secret enemies, politic and watchful. Chance threw opportunities in our way, but need I tell you that she shunned, and I did not seek their repetition."

"That will do," said Sybil, moving away slightly.

"I want to know no more. She was truer than I thought ——"

"Truer!" he interrupted with some passion. "Why, from the first she decreed that you should not marry that wretched young man; her plan was not ripe yet, Sybil — your father was not won, and she did not want to leave this house. So she tempted that miserable Count, and so played upon him, that he wrote — when she held proof she sent it to me, and I came to save you, and unconsciously abetted her. That was her truth."

"And you were jealous," said Sybil moodily; "that was why you came — you were jealous, Mr. Dermot."

"Sybil, Sybil, if I had been jealous, I should have been clear-sighted. Clever as she is, she could not have blinded a jealous man. Besides, I am not all trust like you, Sybil."

Sybil raised her hands.

"Oh! how she deceived us both," she said with a sort of despair, "false to you, false to me, false to him — to all."

Mr. Dermot lightly laid his hand on her arm.

"Sybil," he said significantly, "remember that she was free when she married your father — quite free. I had surrendered her letters, her portrait, and given her back her liberty. I have no right to quarrel or complain, still less have I a right to tell James Kennedy — who no doubt thinks he has married an angel — that this angel was to have been mine. She told me I was her first love, I feel sure she has told him so too. Let him believe her. It is too late to undeceive your father, Sybil, and it would be useless and cruel to at-

tempt it. Never shall a word from me shake his belief in the wife he has married. I shall be silent, and I know you will be silent too. And, Sybil, do not suppose I would have said a word to you, if you, too, could have been cheated into happiness. No; happy are the deceived when the trick is well done, only the sleight of hand must not appear, and the juggler stand betrayed. I know nothing of you, Sybil, if that false woman will ever win back your lost love; but for all that I had a right to bid you beware. She has many arts, and she will do her best to charm you back. Sybil, you may call it revenge if you will, but I should hate — hate mortally to see that traitress kiss and fondle you, and triumph over your innocence. Let her attempt it if she dare!" added Mr. Dermot, stamping his foot angrily, "let her! Sybil, I told you once I would be your true friend, and when I learned her treason — and it was chance betrayed her — my first impulse was to come here, and warn, and guard, and, alas! that I should say so, screen you."

"Why, what can she do to me?" asked Sybil.

"You ask it. The young, beautiful, adored wife of a man of fifty. Sybil, I know what she will attempt — to charm you back if she can, and, failing that, to hunt you out of your father's house and heart. But, Sybil, I have some arrows in my quiver she knows nothing of. Do not fear — do not fear."

He had been walking up and down the room with some agitation. He stopped by her as he uttered the words, and in all her desolation it was comfort to Sybil to look at his careworn, haggard face, and feel that even in this hour of indignation he had a thought for her.

"Did my father ask you to tell me?" inquired Sybil, after awhile.

Mr. Dermot came back and sat by her.

"Your father believes me on my way to Canada. He is in Scotland with the bride, and I did not think it needful to let her know that she will find me here on her return."

"But are you sure they are married?" cried Sybil.

"Am I sure I live! Sybil, I saw them. I was told of this marriage, and I went and saw them."

"And she will come here, and you will be able to bear that, Mr. Dermot?"

"Quite well," he coolly answered.

"Ah! you never loved her as I loved her!"

"Wisely concluded — say rather that my love died a thousand deaths, and that yours has perished at one fell blow. My poor little Sybil, would it were ended — would it were!"

He spoke in such pitying accents that Sybil's full heart melted. Sobs, passionate tears, relieved her. He took her handkerchief and wiped the tears from her cheeks. It was as if she had been a child, and he the fond, indulgent parent comforting it in its first grief.

"Do not!" she said, "do not! You too will cease to care for me, kind as you are now! My father loved me, and he has put me by — and so will you, Mr. Dermot — so will you!"

"I cannot even if I would, Sybil. You have been perverse, unjust, stinging even in your wrath, and yet I cannot cease liking you."

His words were kind, but his looks were kinder than his words. Sybil trembled, and was glad to hear the voice of Mrs. Mush below, and not run the risk of

self-betrayal. This kindness was sweet, but it was both a snare and a torment, spite all its sweetness. Unconscious of her thoughts, Mr. Dermot said quickly, "Sybil we must tell Mrs. Mush nothing — we know nothing."

"Very well," replied Sybil. "Good night, Mr. Dermot."

She left him so quickly that he had not time to remonstrate. Swiftly, as if she were going up to meet the once loved one, Sybil ran up to her room. Not a token was there, but it wrung anew her poor bleeding heart. Again she wept, again she sobbed, passionately upbraiding the deceiver, and feeling in her very inmost being the cruel sting of a deep trust betrayed and a great friendship broken.

Something beyond all this Sybil also felt. Her lover's falsehood had been almost forgotten in the pangs of her second love, and once more treachery had been to her as earthquakes, shipwrecks, and murders, all things terrible and remote, and, thank heaven, never to come within her experience. It is a common illusion. The man who shall be murdered ere the sun has set, rises on his last day in happy ignorance of that fate. Greed or revenge are already on their way, and he goes to meet them as they come to meet him. It is to be in that railway carriage, or on this bridge, or by that lane, or in his own house, and he leaves the spot where he is safe to seek that on which he is to perish. When the whole world has sat in judgment on his fatal story, men remember how he resisted the entreaties that might have saved him. His friends pressed him to stay; they seemed to have the forewarning he failed in, and heeding them not, he went forth

to meet the slayer. He too had heard of murders, of shipwrecks, and strange perils by land and by sea, but he had never realised that they could happen to him. His path was to be safe, his barque was to be charmed, his life was to be inviolate.

So had Sybil felt, and now, like that victim of life's chances, she had not merely abetted her own undoing, but she lived to see it. She had rejected every warning, she had smiled at the "Beware" that might have saved her. She had forced Blanche on her father, she had wearied him with her praises. She had given the traitress the opportunity she might not even have sought for. These were bitter thoughts. But bitterer still rose above them all the ghost of her dead friendship. She suffered as only the young can suffer. The middle-aged are armour-proof. They never trust or believe so entirely as to be quite deceived. They know that to-day's friend may be to-morrow's enemy. But the young, the young who give the whole faith, the whole trust, the whole love, the whole fond passion, or ardent friendship, oh! pity them!"

When Sybil remembered, through that weary night, how she had unveiled her heart to Blanche Cains — how she had allowed her to read every feeling, every thought as it sprang, and when she remembered, too, the use to which this knowledge had been put, and how she had been played upon, and trifled with, and deceived, she moaned again in the bitterness of her anguish.

CHAPTER VII.

"SYBIL, did you sleep last night?"

So spoke Mr. Dermot to Sybil when he found her in the library the next morning. She had stolen down there early, hoping for brief solitude, but he had seen and followed her, and he now stood looking at her pale young face and sad eyes, with grave and pitying attention.

"No, I did not sleep," replied Sybil; "it rained all night, and the wind blew and was a very gale — I could not sleep."

"No, Sybil, you could not sleep, for this was a sad night in your little history. Sybil, is there no comfort for you?"

"None," listlessly replied Sybil, and she turned from him to the window, and looked out at the wet landscape and bleak sky.

"You amaze me," he said, with a touch of anger in his tone; "pray, what charm was there in Blanche Cains that her guilt should thus drive you to despair? Is all truth ended because she was false? — or has life nothing left because of her loss?"

"Life has plenty left," replied Sybil; "but not for me."

"And you are eighteen, and you are good, clever, and very pretty. I wish you would not talk such nonsense, my dear. Why, old as I am, I think that life has something left for me; and what is more, I mean to compel the wayward lady's gifts, and what she'll not bestow, I'll take."

Sybil turned round and looked at him with mingled envy and admiration. He looked very handsome and defiant, and shook his tawny locks as if in very scorn of fate.

"You see," he continued gaily, "faint heart never won fair lady. Life is a woman, and when we court her smiles, she jilts us. We must compel her kindness, Sybil."

Mr. Dermot half hoped by this libel on her sex to draw forth Sybil's indignation, and rouse her from her apathy; but Sybil was mute. Her heart was full too, for she thought how willingly she would bestow her smiles if they were but sought, and how her kindness need never be compelled.

"What! not a word?" he said, looking at her wistfully; "Sybil, Sybil, that will never do. Scold me as you did last night — I shall like it a great deal better."

"I cannot," replied Sybil; "I feel dead this morning."

"I wish, Sybil, you would tell me Miss Cains's hold upon your heart. I care more for your little finger than she ever cared for your whole person. I would do anything to serve you, and almost anything to please you; but, alack the day, I have not blue eyes and golden hair, and an angelic face, so you care naught for me."

He spoke in jest, but Sybil could not bear that he should say it even in jest.

"Do not think so," she answered earnestly; "oh! pray do not, Mr. Dermot. I value your kindness —"

"I do not want that — I want you to value me, Sybil."

"Well, then, I do," she bravely replied; "indeed I do."

"Very much?"

"More than you think, Mr. Dermot."

She spoke with a sad earnestness, that brought tears to her eyes.

"My poor little Sybil," he said, looking down at her kindly, "I very much fear Uncle Edward is now your only friend. Do you hear that hammering upstairs, and do you know its meaning? No; well, then, be it known unto you that there arrived this morning a host of packing-cases full of furniture, new, costly, and splendid, for the use or pleasure of the bride. Blanche Cains has sold herself, and no one will surely blame her that she exacts the full purchase price from her foolish buyer. So this price is coming, or, at least, some fair instalments of it, under every luxurious aspect a woman's fancy can devise. Two experienced Parisian upholsterers are now unpacking the bower of Mrs. Kennedy. Come and look on, Sybil, you must steel yourself betimes."

Sybil reddened and turned pale; but, yielding to a bitter fascination, she went.

The two men had come armed with a letter of instructions from Mr. Kennedy, telling them which rooms to adorn, but not saying a word more. To his daughter he had not written, and had she not been aware of his message, she might have supposed that she was the object of his munificence. Alas! was this silent indifference the forewarning of her new destiny?

Blanche had no doubt chosen her old room, for this the two men were now engaged in arranging. Very deftly did they set about their task. They

stripped the room of its contents, ruthlessly destroying every little proof of Sybil's tenderness and care. They cast forth a little rosewood table she had placed there, and the muslin-covered toilet fashioned by her friendly hands; they tore down the very paper from the walls, and in its stead set up silk damask hangings of the most celestial blue. Cunningly woven in this texture, Sybil saw little white cupids disporting themselves midst white flowers, and wreaths, and quivering hearts. Some brandished their arrows with a merciless look; others floated about with bandaged eyes, their arms outstretched helplessly; and others, again, lay in ambush in the wreaths, and bided their hour. Such splendour Sybil had never seen, and had only imagined in the palaces of queens.

"I hope you admire these Cupids, Sybil," said Mr. Dermot — "pray do; they cost a pound a yard, and they are dead cheap at that price — a bargain, these men tell me."

"They are very pretty," said Sybil, in order to say something.

"So they are, but God forbid there should ever be such Cupids in your room when you marry, and come home, Sybil. Better bare whitewashed walls, and true love any day than this."

The walls now being hung, the rest of the furniture was unpacked, and brought up. The carpet might have vied with any painting, so fresh were its roses. A goddess might have trod upon it, and fancied herself in Olympus. The bed, too, was of some rare grey wood, with a satin sheen, and the toilet-table was trimmed with costly lace. Everything else matched, and when the delicate curtains hung from the window,

and floated around the bed, the whole room looked so exquisite and dainty, that Sybil's heart swelled with jealousy, and she felt the dawn of a new torment.

"The worst of all this vanity," said Mr. Dermot, following her out of the room, "is that it is taken out of our substance, Sybil. Your money and mine will in the end pay for all that splendour. James Kennedy is not a rich man, and the foolish woman is killing the bird with the golden eggs. The drawing-room, too, is to be new furnished. The plain red velvet will not do now; we must have some tapestry second only to Gobelin's, and carved chairs, all gold and glitter. I believe there is also a new carriage for the divinity of Saint Vincent, and a costly harp has come, across which she will fling her fair arms. She certainly knows what suits her beauty, and I suppose that is an art too. And now, Sybil, a friendly word: Do not sit down and grieve, and fret away your roses, and dim your bright eyes with weeping. Be young, be gay, and handsome; and if you find some honest man worthy of you, why, Sybil, take him, and fly from this house, for, verily, perdition is hanging over it."

"Thank you," shortly said Sybil — "I am in no hurry."

"Who said you should be? But you do not seem pleased, yet I mean well. Sybil, we have been wrecked in the same ship — we are cast ashore on the same desert island; do not quarrel with me, your faithful friend, because I want to fashion out the means of escape. You are going to the garden, Sybil — let me go with you, and smoke a cigar as we walk along; there is much I wish to say to you."

They stood in the hall; he took down her cloak

which was hanging there, and wrapped it around her. Sybil did not say nay, but it was with a cold, irritated look, that she yielded. Sybil felt like that garden which they now entered. The sun shone upon it — but did its watery gleam give the dead earth life, or bid the sap of spring flow in the trees, or the joy of summer abide in their barren boughs? There was no comfort for her, and his kindness, though well meant, was only a new torment. He bade her forget, be happy, and marry; but could he offer her the love which would drown her cares in sweet oblivion? Could he take charge of her happiness, and compensate her heavy losses by giving her the tenderness of father, friend, and husband, all in one? — he did not — he could not. Then why trouble her with words? — why not leave her to silence and peace? Mr. Dermot walked by her side, unconscious of her thoughts, and by his language he added to her secret irritation.

“You see, Sybil,” he said, “the hardship of your position is this — that you may have to live years perhaps with your enemy. I call her your enemy, not that I believe she hates you, but that in self-defence she must end by doing so. You will never love her again. Of course you will forgive her, but we all know what forgiveness is without love. Ah! if after cheating and deceiving you, Sybil, she could have her friend back, why you may be sure she would; but as she cannot she must rule her step-daughter — and how will you like that? Not at all; then take my word for it, marriage — I mean good and honourable marriage, is your only safeguard.”

He had come back to the hateful theme.

“And how will *you* manage, Mr. Dermot?” asked

Sybil — “surely you, too, will have your difficulties?”

Mr. Dermot took out his cigar, and smiled a peculiar smile.

“Say rather that Mrs. Kennedy will have her difficulties,” he replied at length. “She thought me safe off to Canada; she probably thought she could make your father keep me there. Foolish woman! She has married the most secretive of men, and knows nothing of his intentions, his power, or his business. Providence has been too much for her in one matter at least. I shall not go to Canada; and she must either leave Saint Vincent or bear with the infliction of my presence — for here I stay — for life, perhaps.”

“For life!” thought Sybil, her heart beating, “for life!”

“So you see,” he resumed, “I am all right, and need take no trouble.”

“Then you feel nothing!” cried Sybil, impetuously — “you were to have married her — and yet you feel nothing!”

“And you think me cold-blooded?” he said quietly. “Why, so I should be if I loved her, or rather had loved her, and could stay and look on.”

“And did you not then?”

“I have already told you that Blanche Cains and the woman I loved were two; but I will be more explicit. Almost from the first week that she entered this house my love sickened. I could not help it — it was her doing. I resisted, but the disease was too strong for the leech’s art, and long before we parted, and I burned the letters she returned, the love that gave them birth lay cold and dead — a thing of ashes.

And now what do you want me to feel because she has married your father? Regret — jealousy — resentment. Pshaw! I feel pity and sorrow for James Kennedy, and to see her again is not pleasant. There is such a thing as the dregs of affection; and, believe me, Sybil, they are hateful food, as nauseous as man ever tasted; but, beyond that, what can I feel?"

"True — she has not robbed you?"

"Has she not, though!" he replied, his cheek flushing; "and what do you call three years of my life spent in adoring her? — for of course I adored her. She was great, beautiful, good — a divinity, and the worship lasted three years. And what do you call the wakening — not sudden, like yours, but gradual and slow, to the hard — hard truth? I worshipped Una, and lo and behold you, instead of the heavenly maid with her milk-white lamp, behold a false Duessa, as hateful as the other was fair! Only you see, Sybil, men and women are differently constituted. I believe it is a woman's nature to brood over lost love — I do not believe it is man's. His pangs are the keener because his nature is stronger, more violent, if you like, than woman's; but they are also the less enduring of the two. I confess that the ignoble passion which can survive esteem is beyond my comprehension."

"And why did you cease to esteem her?" asked Sybil almost sharply.

"Say rather, why, having been blind so long, did you become clear-sighted? Heaven knows, Sybil, I do not — but it was so. You see, I met Miss Cains three years ago in England, and saw but little of her. We got engaged, but met seldom. Distance is a wonderful enchantress, and daily intercourse a terrible tale-teller.

It may be that she helped it too, for she was sick of me, and panted for liberty, and a rich husband. Poor, deluded girl! she little thought that of the two — your father and me — I was the richer man. Let him give her silk Cupids, Sybil, and upholsterer's splendour, it will go hard indeed if Uncle Edward does not get you a wealthier husband, and a more substantial home than she has bought with all her perfidy."

This promise exasperated Sybil.

"I will not marry," she said angrily, and her eyes flashing; "do I not see by you, Mr. Dermot, the value of a man's liking? You do not know yourself why you ceased loving Miss Cains. It came, it went, it was gone, and you are glad — anyone can see you are glad of that perfidy which wrings my very heart. And you want me to marry! — to be liked a few days, then put by like the toy that has ceased to please, or is secretly detested! Never — never! I will die first."

Her passion, her anger, and energy amazed Mr. Dermot. But he soon rallied.

"Sybil," he said smiling, "it is not worth, it is not even beauty — that lure to the eye — which waken love, for mystery is the name of its birth. But that a man of sense and honour, who has married for love a good and handsome woman, can cease to love her, I will never believe. His judgment, his taste, his conscience will keep him true. There is both mental and moral depravity in unjustified faithlessness. If you ever win a true man, Sybil, you will keep him, and that without effort."

"You think so?" said Sybil with a dreary smile, in which Mr. Dermot read doubt and irony.

"Sybil, Sybil, you vex me," he said, his face flushing slightly. "I know you wrong me in your thoughts, but if you had a few years more, or I a few years less, I would find a way to convince you."

He looked at her more in anger than in love, but the anger quickly passed away, and the tenderness remained — a tenderness in which blended reproach and regret. Sybil's breath seemed gone. Never before had she felt as if she could please Mr. Dermot's eye, or as if her beauty were more than a child's in his sight. Provoked though he was, he knew what he was saying, and his voice rang true to every word he had uttered. A word, a look, a breath might place eternal happiness within her grasp. The word was not spoken; neither look or sign was given.

"I will die before I win him so," thought Sybil, clenching her slender hands together.

She caught his look, eagerly perusing her troubled face, and in its puzzled meaning she read a half revelation of the truth. In a moment she was calm and grave.

"Thank you," she said with a little mocking smile, and with a cool, unconcerned voice.

Mr. Dermot looked disappointed, like one who, stooping to pick up a gem, finds a worthless bauble in its stead.

"And yet 'tis a pity," he said unvoluntarily.

"For me?" suggested Sybil with a curling lip.

"No, no, Sybil, for me, of course," he replied with a grave smile. "I know that young ladies of your age consider men of mine to be quite in the 'sear and yellow leaf;' and I believe, Sybil, they are right."

Youth needs youth, and when I look for a husband for you —”

“I shall be much obliged to you, Mr. Dermot, to do no such thing,” indignantly interrupted Sybil; “I consider your remarks rude and impertinent.”

“Do you, Sybil? Well, so they might be, if I were not your only friend now, my poor little girl.”

The kindness of his tone, his pitying looks, went to Sybil's heart. Her eyes grew dim, her lips trembled.

“Forgive me,” she said, “do not mind me — be my friend still, only do not try to comfort me by talking so — it exasperates me.”

Mr. Dermot did not answer her, but he thought, “She cannot forget that foolish Count!” and the thought annoyed him. A brief pause followed. When Sybil spoke, it was to ask what they should say to Mrs. Mush.

“Nothing, my dear, we know nothing. She saw the packing-cases, and knows of their contents and destination — do not start so, child, I mean that she guesses, and precisely because she guesses, she is mute. So be you.”

He spoke quietly, and rather coldly, and without looking at her. He was displeased. Sybil saw that, but why so? She lingered a while near him, then, seeing that he remained cold and silent, she left him slowly.

Mr. Dermot was displeased, but he was vexed with himself for that displeasure. What was it to him if Sybil regretted her faithless lover? Had he ever wished to be more than her friend? Did he wish it even now? “Foolish girl, all I want is to see her safely

married!" he thought. But did he really wish that? The doubt startled Mr. Dermot. It was all very well to be Sybil's friend, but it would be desperate folly to become Sybil's slave. In a moment Mr. Dermot's pride was in arms, as he saw himself a fond lover at saucy little Sybil's mercy. He smiled the vision to scorn, and mentally uttered a firm and inexorable "Nay."

Something of this Sybil felt when they met at breakfast. Mrs. Mush was in her usual spirits; Mr. Dermot was cheerful with her, and very kind with Sybil. But his kindness was tempered with a grave familiarity, which sank her into the merest little girl. If a vague hope had crept into Sybil's heart that morning, it died stillborn before she rose from the table.

CHAPTER VIII.

GRIEF is a stream that deepens as it flows. On the amazement which Sybil had felt, now followed a dark despondency.

We all have read in the early history of the Church, how statesmen, sages, great warriors, unlettered peasants, simple women, put down the old heathen worship, and took up the faith of Christ. We all, according to the measure of our fervour, have marvelled at, and sometimes envied them, the joy of leaving foul error and finding shining truth. But have we thought of the pangs and the heart-faintings which preceded the advent of their Christian belief? Was it not a fearful thing to see that glorious Olympus emptying

of all its gods and goddesses, as if star by star, and planet by planet, had dropped from man's sky? Where was the majesty of Jove, the breath of whose ambrosian curls shook the world? What became of the calm wisdom of Pallas, and the beauty of Venus, and the fleetness of Mercury, and the glory of Apollo? — did they too vanish? Whether they perished in one great cataclysm of the soul, or melted away out of its domain into shadowy greyness, a dreary void followed. It was not at once that a sublimer faith stepped in and conquered. A voice proclaimed, indeed, to the dismayed world, that the great Pan was dead; but the cross on Calvary, and the new heaven, with choirs of angels, and mighty prophets, and ardent apostles, and palm-bearing martyrs in white robes, were still matters of doubt or speculation to multitudes. Think of the agonies which the searching soul endured between these two truths: that which having proved a falsehood was lost for ever, and this which was not yet grasped. Alas! the bitter pangs and throes which the heathen world then bore, we have to bear on the day when we put by some great worship, and wander forth in the darkness of our unbelief. Our heaven of friendship or of love, of some creed, mortal or divine, is empty, and no other God has come to fill it. The old faith is dead, but the new one is not yet born, and the interregnum is inexpressibly grievous and wearisome. In this dark mood felt Sybil. She had set her heart on one great adoration, and it was dust and ashes. No other feeling had been so strong in her as this, for in it she had placed her whole faith, and to it she had trusted her whole heart. Every other she had stinted in some measure — to this she had denied

nothing. She had given it trust, hope, tenderness, all her heart had to give! Why had it ended in her bitter confusion and humiliation? Oh! how hard, how very hard it was; and how the poor young thing, unused to such battles of the soul, felt tossed on a sea of doubt and calamity! How she spent day and night in sad lamenting over her incomparable wrong! She felt singled out by Fate, and thought hers the cruellest sorrow that had ever been borne. She could not help it. I wonder if any one could have convinced her that hers was no solitary lot; that grief as deep had often been felt by men and women who had outlived it and long been dust; that a treason as shameful had been wrought again and again to the trusting friend in days and years, ay, and in ages too long gone by! That the present held ought like her story, Sybil would have resented with indignation and grief. Throughout all time the sorrowing heart has had but one self-same cry:

"Oh! all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow."

Thus, in her own eyes, at least, her wrongs were paramount. Never had a friend been so betrayed as Sybil Kennedy; never had truth, and honour, and generosity, and every virtue which should flourish in a woman's heart, been so outraged as by Blanche Cains. She dwelt and brooded over these things in bitterness and vexation of spirit, fretting all chance of patience away. She thought of her utter loss, as the merchant thinks of his great ship that went down in the sucking waves, and was devoured by them. It was laden with Indian treasure, with gold, and precious silks, and costly spice, and yet this priceless freight could not

save it. As he hates that greedy devouring sea, and chafes at it, so did Sybil now hate life which had wronged her so cruelly, and so pitilessly plundered her.

Mrs. Mush, who suspected much, but knew nothing, could not console Sybil. Mr. Dermot, who had survived the loss of his beautiful mistress, knew that Sybil would outlive the treachery of her adored friend. He left the sad girl to her own thoughts, and administered comfort under the general form of kindness. Sometimes Sybil took, and sometimes she rejected this medicine. Mr. Dermot bore with her waywardness, and would not be discouraged. His patient goodness at length conquered her one morning.

Mr. Dermot had found her alone in the drawing-room; he had as usual done his best to draw her into conversation, and Sybil had, as she often did, given him short, wearied replies, that said plainly,

"Let me be at peace."

"It is no use, Sybil," he said, sitting down by her side; "I will not indulge you in that constant moping. You must be yourself one more, my little bright and gay Sybil. Do you remember her? I do quite well."

Sybil did not answer. He continued:

"She was as merry as a lark, and as busy as a bee. Her work did not linger as does this now lying idly on your lap. She read, she studied, she sang, she ran about the garden. She was grave as a judge sometimes, and sometimes as mischievous as a fairy. I liked her very much, and I think that she liked me. And now she has vanished, and there is another Sybil in her stead; a sad Sybil, whom neither eloquence, nor

praise, nor blame can waken from her apathy, and who, worst of all, cares about nothing and no one."

"But I do care about you, Mr. Dermot," said Sybil, gravely.

"I wish you would prove it, then."

"How so?"

Mr. Dermot hesitated. Sybil was not his niece, nor his sister, nor anything to him save his little friend. The language of friendship is often too like that of love, and though he did not think she would misconstrue him, he had the prudence which springs from experience, and he would not give her cause to do so.

"My little Sybil," he said, at length, "when we care about people, we generally find a way of proving it — an easy, natural way, which springs from the sincerity of your feeling."

Sybil's colour came and went.

"Ah! if he knew," she thought, "if he knew!"

But Mr. Dermot did not know, he did not even suspect. So he resumed:

"Yet friendship is pleasant. I wish you were really my brother's daughter, Sybil — say a little orphan girl whom I had to take care of. And then there would be no Mrs. Kennedy to vex and trouble us in this quiet old Abbey. You would like Uncle Edward fast enough if you had no one else to like, and I need not be sitting here a whole morning to coax you into a good humour."

"Indeed — indeed you are too good," cried Sybil. "I do not deserve your kindness, I do not. I am perverse, naughty, disagreeable. But, Mr. Dermot, I cannot help it sometimes. Oh! think of it — I have lost a friend."

"And I have won an enemy — a keen, bitter enemy."

"Surely she cannot hurt you," said Sybil, uneasily. "Surely ——"

"Yes, she can," interrupted Mr. Dermot, with a short, defiant laugh. "And what is more, she will try to do so. Let her! With God's help I will be a match for her again and again. Providence defeated her once, why not twice or thrice?"

Sybil was startled.

"What did she do?" she asked, under her breath.

"I shall tell you later."

"Later! and you say I am your friend!" she said, jealously.

"You, are, Sybil, but I cannot tell you now, nor here. Take a walk by the sea this afternoon, and I will meet you there, and tell you."

The entrance of Mrs. Mush did not allow Sybil to reply. This lady gave them both a keen, merry look, then became very demure. Mr. Dermot saw nothing. Sybil who felt her face burn bent it over her work, and stitched assiduously. Mrs. Mush sat down in an American rocking-chair, leaned back, folded her hands on her lap, and said, in her clear voice,

"Mr. Dermot, which do you like best in a love-story, the first or the last chapter?"

"What love-story are you reading, Mrs. Mush?"

"None. I never read stories."

"And I never read love-stories."

"But if you did read love-stories, which would you prefer, the first or the last chapter?"

"Oh, momentous question! Pray how am I to answer it? The first chapter may be sweet and the

last bitter — an Idyll closing in tragedy. Mrs. Mush, I can venture no opinion without first hearing you."

"Well, then, Mr. Dermot, I say there should be no last chapter — that it is the fatal mistake of all dealers in love fiction to write one. Every century, or half or quarter of a century, nay, every year if you like it, should have its love-stories, which the next year, or next century, should take up and continue. I speak of the survivors, for every period should bury its own dead. A comfortable plan would this be, in my opinion, and it would do away with the inevitable wedding-favours of one tribe of writers, or the no less inevitable grave and churchyard of the other. Why should Sir Charles Grandison wed and lose all his graces by becoming an obsolete grandpapa. Why should sweet Virginia be drowned and buried? The imagination of Richardson and Saint Pierre was exhausted — granted; but young writers could have sprung up to take up the tale. It was only taking his wig off Sir Charles and making him put by his sword — or dressing Virginia a little differently, and sending Paul off for her in a life-boat. Bless you, I would have spun it on for ever so long! That matchless gentleman should have wedded no Miss Byron had I been free, and no dark envious earth should cover Virginia's angel face. It is too bad that imaginary beings should be subject to the ills of mortality. No — no; there should never be a last chapter to a love-story if I had my way, Mr. Dermot. It should go on for ever and ever — as it will in Heaven, I trust. But why do you never read love-stories, Mr. Dermot? Do you like the practice better than the theory?"

"You have hit the right nail on the head, Mrs. Mush. I like the theory of nothing."

"Well, Sybil — Why, where is Sybil?"

"Sybil is gone, Mrs. Mush. I am sorry to say that when you spoke of sending off Paul for Virginia in a lifeboat, Sybil put down her work and left the room in silent indignation."

"She likes the drowning. Youth is cruel, Mr. Dermot — give it dark endings, and graves, and mopings, kill all — that is youth's way, and Sybil is pale and altered. I am afraid she is fretting for that lover of hers."

Mr. Dermot looked scornful.

"Fretting for him!" he said. "Sybil has too much sense."

"Oh, I do not think her inconsolable; but youth is silly, Mr. Dermot."

"Sybil is not silly, Mrs. Mush. She is full of sense, when she pleases; and she has too refined a taste to go on regretting that man."

"Oh, I never questioned her taste," said Mrs. Mush smiling; "and I have no doubt that her next venture will show more judgment, and be more fortunate than the first."

"I hope so," was the composed reply. "Good morning, Mrs. Mush. I must leave you."

"A pair of simpletons!" thought Mrs. Mush; "as if I did not know what was coming."

Mrs. Mush was a great reader of love's symptoms, and she had for some days past seen what she called "love incipient" in Mr. Dermot's eye. He might not know it, but Mrs. Mush, the wise leech, knew it for

him, and as he was much in her favour, she neither wished to cross him, nor to deprive Sybil of what Mrs. Mush called a good chance. Moreover, she was like Sancho Panza — she liked a good love-story of all things, and here was one pretty, good, and true, ready-made for her.

“Poor things!” she thought, let them be comforted if they can. I know Mr. Kennedy is married to that Miss Cains, with her white teeth, and I do believe Mr. Dermot had an eye after the false lady. Let Sybil comfort him, and let him comfort Sybil.”

CHAPTER IX.

MR. DERMOT was walking along the beach with downcast eyes. Sybil's light footsteps made no noise on the sand, and he neither saw nor heard her till she stood by his side.

“Why, you little mermaid,” he said, “did you come out of the sea?”

“No,” replied Sybil gravely.

“No! and you deny it, as much as to say I might have come out of the sea if I chose, but I did not. Well, Sybil, you are but a little pale spirit of the sea, for I will not call you a mermaid. Ah! when will you get back your roses?”

Sybil looked at him wistfully. He was very kind, and spoke very kindly, but how far apart they stood, on shores as remote as their feelings were different. She loved him very much, infinitely, it seemed to her, but without hope or desire. His indifference had made

her passionless. She had no thought of his love for her as a possible event. She had scarcely ever allowed herself to wish for it, and now, though he was free, though he was always praising and admiring her in some way or other, she could listen to his praises and meet his look with sad and unmoved gravity. He meant nothing, and she felt nothing. Mr. Dermot was struck with her serious aspect. Was this the childish Sybil of a few months back? That pale young face had lost its sunny open meaning, and got, instead, the sad wisdom of years.

"Will you walk or sit down?" he asked after awhile?

Sybil preferred walking, so they paced the sandy beach side by side. A grey sky bent over a grey sea, with streaks of shining silver. Rippling waves, so soft that they scarcely seemed to advance, gently beat the yellow shore with a steady encroaching step. The wind was still, and clouds of a deep bluish grey veiled the extreme points of the winding coast.

"There is a divine calmness in such days, Sybil," said Mr. Dermot, speaking first. "Sunshine, green fields, and blue sky perplex grief and vex the mind. This sullen sky, this vast calm sea, soothe a troubled heart. Life is short, they say, and full of weariness, but we are great and patient. Nothing frets us out of our gloomy serenity. We bear and forbear — be as we are."

Sybil stood still.

"Mr. Dermot," she said, "you have a new grief to tell me."

"Yes," he replied. "Your father is coming home

to-day. I know it by Leblond, the foreman, to whom he wrote a few lines — a business order."

"And he does not write to me," said Sybil.

"Sybil, he wishes to take you by surprise; that is the meaning of his silence."

"Well," said Sybil, after a pause, "I must bear with it — I knew it was coming — you have something else to tell me, Mr. Dermot?"

"No, Sybil, that is all I know."

"Yes, but you have something else to tell me — I came here for that."

"Sybil, will you not have trouble enough on your mind without my adding to it? — these are sad, very sad revelations for youth, and you are still so young," he pityingly added.

"The last year has made me old in sorrow, Mr. Dermot; you need not spare me. Nothing will surprise, and few things can grieve me now."

Mr. Dermot opened his pocket-book, and took out a slip of paper, which he placed in Sybil's hand. It was in the handwriting of Blanche Cains, a mere scrawl, on which all Sybil saw was, "Johnson and Co., Quebec — the *Mountain Fairy*."

"You can make nothing of this," he said, taking it back from her; "and yet, Sybil, this slip of paper, which I picked up when the man moved the furniture out of Mrs. Kennedy's room, is the key to a mystery. You remember the letter that sent me off so suddenly? Well, I had time, just time before going on board, to call on the supposed writer of that letter, and I learned that it was a forgery. You now know why I did not go to Canada."

Sybil seemed awestruck.

"She forged it," she said in a low voice.

"My dear, she knew we were uneasy about these Johnsons — she knew the *Mountain Fairy* sailed on such a day, and she wanted me to be out of the way till she was married. 'After that,' she thought, 'I can brave it out.'"

"And she wrote that letter?"

"No — here it is — it is a man's hand, and bears no resemblance to her writing. Miss Cains has a brother."

"A brother!" interrupted Sybil; "no, Mr. Dermot, she has no brother."

"Yes, she has — only she did not tell you so. Miss Cains can keep a secret, and she has no cause to be proud of that young man. God forgive me if I wrong him, Sybil, but I conscientiously believe Mr. Reginald Cains to be his sister's tool and accomplice. We were blind, too, and without suspicion, else some slight tokens might have enlightened us. The writing, though like, is yet too different to bear comparison. The paper on which it is written is that of the firm; but not of the usual size. This was some sheet used for some purpose or other, and from which the bottom has been torn — look at it, you will see that it has been clipped by scissors — depend upon it, Sybil, this sheet was abstracted from our papers here, and went back to London to come once more to St. Vincent. Another token was this: the envelope is a common one, not the blue-wove with the name and address of the firm on the seal. Now, I see all this; but then in the hurry of the moment neither your father nor I saw anything. He was glad to have me out of the way, and it was deliverance for me to go

too. We were puppets in her hands, Sybil, and now she is rejoicing over her skill and our folly. You look amazed and startled. My poor little Sybil, did you think her incapable of it? Wonder at nothing, and be on your guard."

"And you," said Sybil, drawing close to him, and looking up in his face.

"Well, I shall be on my guard too. She will try to harm me, Sybil, and I could tell you beforehand, from what direction her arrow will fly. There is just one little dark spot in yon calm horizon. The storm is there, Sybil, and it will come here from that faint speck. Even so will her latent hatred bide its hour and take its course."

"Mr. Dermot, what will she do — what will she attempt?"

Mr. Dermot was silent.

"I cannot tell you — Sybil, it is not right that I should do so; but have you ever spoken to her about Mr. Smith, and has she ever questioned you?"

Sybil looked startled and frightened.

"Is Mr. Smith in it?" she stammered.

"You do not answer me, Sybil."

"Yes, she did question me — but you know yourself I knew nothing."

"She made something out of it, Sybil, but let it be. It will be well for her and for us all if she means no harm."

He looked composed but grave. Sybil's heart sank, and she sickened with fear.

"Mr. Dermot," she said, "is there no way of keeping that Mr. Smith quiet?"

"None, Sybil," he replied, a little ironically.
"Quiet him, indeed!"

"But why should he abet her?"

"Why, indeed; but he will as surely as that tide will flow in to-night."

"I always detested that man," cried Sybil vehemently.

"Do not, child, he is harmless if she will but be wise."

"And if she will not, Mr. Dermot?"

"If she will not, there is nothing but trouble in store for us all."

"And can no one meddle — can no one advise or interfere?"

"No one," he gravely answered. "For to advise would be to tell her what she has no right to know — and, Sybil, she is not good enough to be trusted. No, even though it is her interest and her duty to be mute, she must know nothing. Her ignorance is our only safeguard. Her knowledge might be our perdition."

"Then it is a secret," said Sybil.

"It is, as you say, a secret. A secret in your father's life and in mine. It is known to few, but yet it may prove to be known to too many. She may never get hold of it, or she may grasp it at once, and sacrifice everything to a double revenge. Let her, Sybil — let her!"

Sybil longed to question, but did not dare to do so. There was, apart from his words, something in Mr. Dermot's face which silenced her. She could not understand, or even attempt to gain its meaning; but

it enjoined her to be mute, and forbade her to hope for a reply.

"And so," she said pitifully, "she will do all she can against you, and I must look on and see it. Mr. Dermot, will my father let her?"

"Your father, Sybil, will let her do whatever she pleases till she betrays herself — as she must in the end. But in the meanwhile, do you think I will tell him that I was to have married his wife, and that she sent me off to Canada to get rid of me? Sybil, the day your father knows that Blanche Cains was my betrothed, our friendship is at an end. Even as it is, I know that before a year is out she will have made us bitter foes. Let her, I will not help her to it. And if you care for me, Sybil, be silent. Do not speak — do not hint. Never, whatever you may learn or see — never attempt to speak to your father."

Sybil sat down on a ledge of rock, and looking at the waves which almost touched her feet, she longed to be at rest in their quiet floating world.

"I wish I were dead!" she said passionately, and suddenly raising her voice, "I wish I were dead! The friend I loved is your enemy and mine. She is worse, she is base and treacherous, and I must loathe what I once cherished so fondly; and to crown all she is coming home to-day my father's wife. I wish I were dead, Mr. Dermot!"

"And I wish I had told you nothing," he said, reproachfully. "You said I did not trust you, Sybil, and see what my trust has done!"

"And can I help it?" cried Sybil. "Can I help it? Do you think I care nothing for you, and that I can think of her hatred being fastened upon you, and

not feel it? I tell you, Mr. Dermot, to be on your guard — I tell you so again and again. I remember words which she dropped, and which sicken me now. Oh! I wish I were dead in that salt water there, rolling with the waves like that tangled mass of sea-weed, and feeling no more than it feels!”

“Sybil! Sybil! if you care for me, never speak so,” he said, in a tone full of concern. “Never look as you look now, so desperate and pale, or you will make me hate Blanche Cains a little too much. Depend upon it,” he added, more calmly, “I shall not let her come within reach of me if I can help it; if I cannot, I shall do my best, and prevail against her, I trust. But, Sybil, if you care for me, never utter such wishes as that you have just spoken. I am not always the slave of imagination, but sometimes that cruel power, far more cruel than it is beneficent, masters me. Just now the curling foam of that long wave took a human shape as it broke on the beach, and I saw you lying on the sand, your white face turned up, your hair all tangled with sea-weed, and the cold waves breaking over you.”

Sybil tried to laugh, but the tears stood in her eyes.

“I thought you were prose, Mr. Dermot!” she said.

“That is not poetry, Sybil. That is superstitious fear, the weakness which comes to us whenever there is some evil threatening what we love.”

Sybil bowed her head, and her tears flowed. Yes, he loved her, not with man's passion for youth and beauty, but with man's tenderness for the unprotected weakness of woman. He loved her, and that love was

very sweet, though later he would take it from her and give it to some other woman, as her father had given his to Blanche Cains.

"Well, what is it?" asked Mr. Dermot, bending towards her.

Sybil looked up, and frankly replied,

"I thank you very much, Mr. Dermot, for I have a very wayward temper, and many faults, and spite them all you are true to me. You give me all the liking you can. I know that later you will not be able to do so. You will have other ties that will absorb you, and leave me but a little share of your goodwill; but for what you give me now, I am grateful, and when you take it away I shall not murmur, knowing I never deserved it."

Her frankness and humility touched him very much. He felt slightly troubled, too, for a voice within him seemed to say, "Why wait and seek further, maybe to fare worse? Have you not here the two things you prize most, truth and beauty? Would you not stake your life on her guileness, and pale and wan as she is now, is she not very sweet and fair? Happiness and love would bring back all its roses to her young face, and more than their old light to those dark eyes of hers."

He looked at her as he thought so. He was unconscious of the fixedness of his gaze, but Sybil reddened.

"I think I shall go in," she said.

"I wish you would stay a little while longer," he said. "We shall not have such another walk as this in a hurry, Sybil. Mrs. Kennedy is coming, and with

her adieu to liberty and happy conversation, and pleasant hours. Ay, verily adieu to them all!"

"Yes," sadly said Sybil, "adieu indeed!"

"And yet I should like to speak to you now and then, Sybil. What shall be your favourite walk?"

Sybil shook her head. She did not know.

"Will you come here by the sea?" he asked.

"Yes, sometimes," hesitatingly replied Sybil.

"About this hour?" he suggested.

Sybil said yes again. He spoke very quietly, as of a matter of course. She knew these were no lover's assignations, and yet she had scarcely said yes when she resolved never to come. What should she do here walking with him by the lonely shore? She was not his sister, his niece, or his betrothed, and she must live under the eye of a woman who knew her secret. Almost at the same moment similar thoughts occurred to Mr. Dermot. He frowned and stood still.

"No," he said; "we must not come here to meet, Sybil. I forget Mrs. Kennedy. We will not give her that triumph. We must trust to chance, or say, rather to Providence. And so you will go?"

"Yes," replied Sybil; "but I will not go to the house. I cannot bear to see her arrive. I will go and spend the day with Aunt Glyn. Pray send some one for me this evening?"

"I shall go for you myself, Sybil; but I shall not go up, of course."

Thus they parted. As she entered the house alone, Sybil met Mrs. Mush. Now, though that lady liked a love-story, she thought Sybil had been too long away, and objected to this chapter.

"My dear," she said, rather gravely, "where have you been all this time?"

"Down by the sea," replied Sybil.

"To take a lonely walk?" suggested Mrs. Mush, very pointedly.

Accusation always made Sybil strong. Her face cleared as she quickly replied:

"No, I found Mr. Dermot there."

Her frankness disconcerted Mrs. Mush. She looked at her wondering and perplexed, then said honestly:

"I do not understand you, Sybil. Sometimes you seem very shy with that Mr. Dermot, who is a wonderfully cool and easy gentleman, and now you have had a walk with him by the sea-side — and you say so too."

"Why should I hide it, Mrs. Mush?"

"You do well not to hide it; but you would do better not to have gone. I have no actual authority over you, but your father is not aware that Mr. Dermot is here; and I think it strange he should wish to have private interviews with you. His suit is not one likely to fail, I believe, with either father or daughter."

"And so, Mrs. Mush," sadly said Sybil, "you think this was a love-meeting? You think Mr. Dermot is the man to make me do such a thing, and I the girl to do it?"

Mrs. Mush looked fairly bewildered.

"Why, child," she said, "if it is not love, what is it? Not business!"

"It is sorrow, sorrow," said Sybil, looking so woe-begone that Mrs. Mush could not but believe her. "And, oh! Mrs. Mush," she added, "do not think he cares for me in that way. He never thought of such

a thing — never! Mr. Dermot thinks me ever so young, and himself ever so old. I am quite a little girl, and he is my grandfather, at the very least.”

“And he is not making love to you?” sceptically said Mrs. Mush.

“No,” indignantly replied Sybil; “he never did — he never will.”

“Well, I never was so mistaken in all my life — why, I thought you were engaged. Well, well, I do not mean to distress you — I shall not say another word; but, my dear, take care — you are not so very young, nor is he so very old, and I do not at all like sea-side meetings between a pretty girl like you, and a handsome gentleman like Mr. Dermot.”

“I do not intend ever going again,” replied Sybil.

She looked very grave and indignant, but her gravity and indignation failed to convince Mrs. Mush. She did not doubt Sybil's word; but for all that, she was as sure love was coming, as we are sure the sun is going to rise when we see the blush of dawn. “A pair of simpletons,” she thought again; and though she could not approve of sea-side meetings, she felt ready to tolerate all else that could make the course of true love run more smooth.

CHAPTER X.

SYBIL was gone to Miss Glyn's, and Mrs. Mush had driven over to Saint Vincent on business. Mr. Dermot sat alone in the library. There was nothing and no one to disturb his thoughts. He took down a book and read awhile; then he put by the volume, and looked his future in the face.

That future wore no pleasant aspect, but apart from the fact that he knew how to endure, Mr. Dermot could contemplate it with composure. It was sure to be dark and troublesome, but it was as sure to be brief. The same house could not long hold him and his enemy, and whichever was vanquished must needs leave. He had told Sybil but half his troubles, after all. That sad portion of his life in which Mr. Smith had played his part he had kept in the shade. He had concealed it from Blanche Cains in the days when she was his betrothed wife, and he would not reveal to Sybil that which she had no right to know. It would only distress her, and could serve no useful purpose.

"I wonder if Mrs. Kennedy knows anything!" he thought; "and knowing it, how she will act? Poor James! he has brought the enemy into the heart of the citadel, and there is no expelling her now. She is there for ever, and holds him fast. Woe to him if he ever displeases her! His charmer will turn tyrant and make him her slave. How he will hate her then, and how she will hate him when she knows all!"

There is something loathsome in the hatred of man and wife; and though for many reasons Mr. Dermot's

friendship for Sybil's father had lost its fervour, though the married life of Blanche Cains was naught to him, he could not linger over the thought of their future strife without pain. The night was calm and mild; he left the library, and went out into the cloister to seek there the soothing and benignant influence of air and sky.

The light which he had left burning behind him poured its pale golden rays into the silent cloister, and lit up one of its arched galleries. A misty moon looked down with a troubled mien on the stone cross, and a few stars pierced the clouds and glimmered faintly in their far region. Mr. Dermot had seen finer nights than this — nights of full-orbed moon and planets, and a thousand glittering worlds; but Nature's power over us lies in our own mood — not in her aspect. When she wants us she calls us — in a moment we are her slaves, and yield ourselves to the mighty goddess.

Blanche Cains, her falsehood, her enmity, the weakness of Mr. Kennedy's friendship, Sybil's sorrow and wrongs, were all forgotten by Mr. Dermot now. As he paced the quiet cloister he felt like one who hears from afar the tumult and the roar of troubled waters, and whom their loud murmur only soothes to a sense of deeper rest. Thus remote were now to him his life and its cares — a tale in which he had no part. But that lull in active life rarely endures. Every human existence is a romance, if not in action at least in feeling — a romance which often has but one reader; and it would be very sweet if every now and then we could turn a page in our own book and calmly read that wonderful story. But it may not be; for a mo-

ment we may stand aloof, like Mr. Dermot, and survey our destiny as something in which we have no part — for a moment, and no more. Soon the outward world calls us forth from that secret stronghold of our inner life — forth into the strife and unrest which flow like a stormy sea around that calm isle.

Mr. Dermot had not long enjoyed the repose of that calm spot and quiet hour, when a far sound of wheels and jingling bells, which rapidly grew nearer, warned him that the bride was coming home. He did not think it needful to go and receive Mr. Kennedy, but neither did he wish to shun meeting him or his wife. So he stayed in the cloister, and waited there till they should cross it to reach the house.

Presently the post-chaise drew up at the gates of Saint Vincent, and Narcisse and Denise, each armed with a lantern, flew to open. In the stillness of the night Mr. Dermot could hear Mr. Kennedy's voice saying, "Take care, my love — this way."

"And Ralph — where is Ralph?" asked the voice of Blanche Cains.

"I am here, ma'am," replied another voice — a woman's, and rather a vulgar voice it was.

"She has brought home a lady's-maid," thought Mr. Dermot — "poor little Sybil, you never had one!"

"I wish you would see to my bonnet-box," continued Mrs. Kennedy — "I am sure the things are awfully crushed, Ralph."

Ralph hoped not — she had been so very particular in the packing.

"Well, but see to it," pursued Mrs. Kennedy, whose voice was drawing nearer.

The door which led from the court she was then crossing to the cloister, opened as she spoke. A dark figure — Denise's, probably — appeared, bearing a lantern, and behind her Mr. Dermot saw two other figures, one of which moved with a loud rustling of silk. He stood still near the cross quietly waiting.

"It seems there is no one here," said Mr. Kennedy to his wife; "but there is a light in the library — who is there, I wonder? — Sybil, perhaps, or Mrs. Mush."

They were moving towards the library window to look in, when Mrs. Kennedy caught sight of Mr. Dermot's figure.

"Who's that?" she whispered, pressing her husband's arm.

Mr. Kennedy took the lantern from the hand of Denise, and raised it, whilst Mr. Dermot came forward. For a while no one spoke. The light that flashed across their three faces showed in each a different meaning. Mr. Dermot's was composed, and slightly ironical; Mrs. Kennedy seemed to have seen a ghost, so pale and bewildered did she look; and Mr. Kennedy was fairly confounded.

"Why, Dermot," he cried, "I thought you were in Canada!"

"I did not go — there was no need for the journey. I will tell you all about it to-morrow."

"And you were here all the time."

"Here, and in England. I there heard of your marriage, and did not think it needful to trouble you with business."

Mr. Kennedy laughed rather a forced laugh.

"I must introduce you to Mrs. Kennedy — an old acquaintance under a new name."

Mr. Dermot bowed. Mrs. Kennedy gave him a calm, distant look of her blue eyes, and shivered slightly.

"Let us go in, my love," said her husband. "Well, Dermot, old fellow, I am glad to see you here again—where's Sybil, though?"

"Sybil is at Miss Glyn's," said Mr. Dermot, "and it is time that I should go and fetch her," he added, looking at his watch.

He bowed again, and walked away at a quick pace.

"What a chill night!" said Mrs. Kennedy, wrapping herself up in a costly shawl; "and what an odd man that Mr. Dermot is, dear. He never wished us joy, nor anything, but stood there like a stick. I don't think I ever was in his good graces, do you know?"

She laughed, with a pretty scorn of Mr. Dermot's favour. But Mr. Kennedy said not a word. He was puzzled and annoyed. Why was Mr. Dermot here in Saint Vincent, instead of being in Canada? Why was his manner so cold and severe? Why had he surveyed him and his wife with that austere gravity? Was Mr. Kennedy the first man of fifty who had married a young and handsome girl? — and what was his marriage to his friend?

"Decidedly that is it;" pursued Mrs. Kennedy, as they entered the house together; "Mr. Dermot took a dislike to me, and is vexed to have me here. Very provoking, is it not?"

"A dislike to you, my love?" replied her husband, looking down with mingled fondness and pride at her blooming face — "why, if I remember aright, Dermot admired you."

"Oh! no — not he," quickly said Mrs. Kennedy.

She spoke in a short, vexed tone, with a little irritated laugh, which did not escape her husband's ear.

"Indeed, I thought better of his taste," he replied, gaily.

To all appearance he was unmoved. But there are thoughts, at first light and passing, which come to us we know not why or how. We scarcely heed them, for they slumber as yet, and their murmurings are low, but they are with us. They grow with daily, though hidden strength; they feed on food we seek for them with unconscious eagerness till the day comes, when a word, a look, waken them into sudden life, and then, when they turn round and sting us — then do we feel, for the first time, it was a serpent we nourished in our bosom. Even such a thought entered Mr. Kennedy's heart as he heard his wife reply, "Oh! no — not he," in that voice of irritated vanity.

Mr. Dermot, in the meanwhile, went on for Sybil, and having sent her in word that he was waiting, he took a few turns up and down the road that passed in front of Miss Glyn's abode.

Great had been Miss Glyn's amazement and indignation on learning the news; but her wrath, indeed, was stronger than her surprise. She remembered having foretold that Blanche Cains was setting her cap at some one, and she forgot that Mr. Dermot, and not Mr. Kennedy, had been the individual designated.

Sybil, whose sad heart had room for very few feelings now, the great one of her grief excepted, heard, and by her silence assented. She did not care for contradiction or for argument, she did not even

care for truth, so she listened in dull, moody silence to Miss Glyn's dark triumph at her own sagacity. For it was singular how quickly the recollection that Mr. Dermot and not Mr. Kennedy had been Miss Cains's intended victim, wore away, and how surely the contrary of this past prophecy now grew up in its stead, and like many an upstart, made its way good and prevailed.

"I told you you should have struck the letter S from her name," said Miss Glyn.

And Sybil remembered fond embraces, moments of passionate confidence and affection, when the two girls were as one, and had but one heart.

"I told you she was thinking of your father all the time, and stayed at home whilst we went to parties," said Miss Glyn; and Sybil's heart turned back to bygone days, when she lay tossing on a sick bed, and Blanche watched by her, all love and fondness then.

"You will have to come and live with me," persisted Miss Glyn; and this time, Sybil heeding her, looked up and said:

"Why so?"

"Why so? — why so? — have you no spirit that you ask?" inquired Miss Glyn, firing up.

"Why should I leave my father's house?" asked Sybil, gravely; "it is my father's house after all — not hers."

"Your father has done what he pleased," hotly said Miss Glyn; "and not what he should have done if he had cared a pin for you — as to that Mr. Dermot, I'll never believe but he was in it — her accomplice, Sybil — her accomplice."

As Miss Cains's accomplice was even then ringing

at Miss Glyn's door, and Sybil could hear his voice inquiring for her, she rose and prepared to go.

"Well, what are you going for?" asked her aunt, whose hearing was not so keen as the young girl's.

Sybil was very pale, and her hands shook as she tied her bonnet-strings.

"Mr. Dermot is below, aunt, and I can guess why he has come."

"The happy pair have arrived, no doubt; now, Sybil, don't go and make a fool of yourself."

Sybil did not answer this kind admonition, but hurried downstairs. She found Mr. Dermot walking up and down in the pale moonlight, with rather restless steps. Oh! how had he felt on seeing her again?

He took her arm in silence.

"Why, child, how you tremble," he said.

"I cannot help it, Mr. Dermot."

"Take heart, Sybil."

"When did they come, Mr. Dermot?"

"About half an hour ago. Pity you were not there, Sybil, to see the face of the bride when she saw me. But she soon recovered. The assurance of some women is incomparable. On my word, it is grand! She gave me a cool broad stare of those blue eyes of hers, then looked at her husband, as much as to say, 'Mr. Dermot, I believe.' Sybil, it is well for me that those white teeth of hers did not dare to bite just then, else Duessa, formerly Una, had not spared me. Take care when she kisses you. I would not trust her."

"Never! never!" cried Sybil, passionately; "never, so long as I live, shall lips of mine touch her cheek; never shall my hand press hers. I have no secret to guard, Mr. Dermot."

"And thank heaven that you have not," he replied, in a tone scarcely less vehement than her own; "thank heaven, Sybil, that you have no daily part to act, no abhorrent recollections to stifle under smiles, no looks of detestation to veil under looks of good-will."

His tone startled and frightened Sybil. A cruel suspicion forced itself upwards like some noxious serpent, do what she would to stifle it in its birth. Was this hatred of the once-loved woman the subtle disguise of unconquered affection, or the unavoidable jealousy of the injured lover?

"Mr. Dermot," she said, "are you sure you ought to remain here? — are you sure you ought not to go away?"

Mr. Dermot was silent awhile, then said in a tone of deep displeasure.

"I suppose, Sybil, your meaning is this: 'Mr. Dermot, are you sure you are not still too fond of my father's wife?' Sybil, I forgive you, but you do not know how cruelly insulting is such a question. Why, Sybil, if Mrs. Kennedy were not as a stranger to me — nay, ten times worse than a stranger — I would not, could not stay more than twenty-four hours in the same house with her and her husband. I would not, because it would be base; and I could not, because I have a touch of the Othello in me. I am inclined to be a jealous man — not a mistrustful one, indeed, but I could not see the woman I loved loving another before my face — it would madden me. So once for all, Sybil, dismiss such thoughts from your mind — if we are to be friends."

His tone was so severe that it cut Sybil to the heart.

"Do not be hard upon me," she entreated; "I meant no harm."

"Hard upon you! Why, no, child, only don't you be hard upon me. I know you don't like me much, but I must have your esteem."

She did not like him much! Had she, then, kept her secret so well?

He resumed very composedly:

"When I say you don't like me much, I mean no reproach; our years, our tempers, our very natures are such as not to allow you any strong affection for me. It is very natural and right that I should care more for a dear little girl such as you are, than you, the dear little girl, should care for an old man of the world such as I am."

Sybil could not bear this.

"But, Mr. Dermot," she said, "I do care for you — indeed I do, very much."

"Do you, Sybil? — well, I should not have thought so. Your friend, Miss Cains, had another tale to tell — but I daresay it was all invention; and now take heart, for you are going to face the evil enchantress herself."

They stood at the gates, which, after a while, Narcisse came and opened. They crossed the cloister, but at the foot of the staircase Mr. Dermot dropped Sybil's arm.

"You do not come up?" she said faintly.

"No, I am busy. Come, take heart; it must be done, and it will soon be over."

He left her, and Sybil went up the staircase alone.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. MUSH was talking loud, and no one heard Sybil entering the room. She stood still near the door, and looked at them. Mrs. Mush sat with her back turned to her, and she saw her father's side-face only. Mrs. Kennedy she saw well.

The drawing-room had donned its new splendour to greet its new mistress, and that mistress herself was like a fair and costly picture, worthy of this rich setting.

The bride sat, half leaning back, on a couch, and her attitude was very graceful. Light wreaths of flowers of vivid hues were scattered on the white cushions against which she rested. She wore a travelling dress of plain silk, but there was depth and richness in its folds. Her slender fingers sparkled with rings, and Sybil caught the glitter of a bracelet on her fair arm. She looked in excellent health, and in high spirits, and what was more, she looked wonderfully handsome.

Sybil's heart swelled within her. This was the girl whom she had brought to that house poor, all but penniless, whom her foolish generosity and affection had thrust on her father's notice, till from indifference Mr. Kennedy had passed to liking, and thence to idolatrous passion. Sybil came forward. Mrs. Mush ceased talking, and Mrs. Kennedy gave a little start, but Sybil did not heed them. She went up to her father, and said, in a low, measured tone,

"I am glad you have come back so well, papa."

"And how are you, Pussy?" he asked, giving her a kiss, but scarcely looking at her.

Sybil quietly replied that she was very well.

Mr. Kennedy put on a gay look, and said,

"I have brought you back someone, Sybil."

Sybil was mute.

"Sybil, have you nothing to say to Mrs. Kennedy?" he asked, sharply.

"I hope Mrs. Kennedy had a pleasant journey," gravely said Sybil.

"Delightful!" replied Mrs. Kennedy.

Mr. Kennedy looked from his wife to his daughter, and seemed perplexed. They were both very calm, and both looked profoundly indifferent. He put his hand into his pocket. Sybil thought it was the present he always brought her when he had been away, and she waited to receive it. She knew beforehand it would not be worth much, but she resolved to accept it as thankfully as if it were a costly gift. Mr. Kennedy drew out a glittering smelling-bottle, and handed it to his wife.

"I beg your pardon, my love," he said, apologetically, "I had forgotten to return this to you."

"Is your head better, dear?" asked Mrs. Kennedy, with tender anxiety.

"It is quite well again, thank you, my dear."

Sybil turned away and went to the table. On her way thither she passed by Mrs. Kennedy. Sybil half bowed. Her step-mother returned the salutation with a cool bend of her fair head, and resumed her discourse with Mrs. Mush. It related to the drawbacks of a sea-journey, and need not be recorded here. Mr. Kennedy frowned, and was inclined to take his daughter

to task forthwith, but he remembered a promise he had made his wife, and he forbore. Leaving the sea-journey, Mrs. Kennedy soon launched into pleasanter topics.

"My dear," she said, to her husband, "we must give a ball. I want to dance, and do not want to go out of my own house to do so. When shall it be?"

Mr. Kennedy went and sat by her side, and smiled down in her handsome face.

"I am not going to let you have a ball just yet, my love," he said. "I must not rouse envy. I have not forgotten the sensation you created at Mrs. Ronald's."

His wife laughed, and showed her handsome teeth, bright and white, like a row of pearls.

"Yes," she said, frankly, "I got fairly hated that night; but I do not fear hate, and you need not fear envy. Besides, I want to show people what beautiful things you can give your wife; and suppose I am handsome," she added, "why should you not show the world that you have got a handsome wife?"

"The world knows it, my dear."

"Oh! but it must both know and remember," said Blanche, wilfully; "and the world is so very, very forgetful," she added, with a sweet smile, "it has such a short memory, poor thing. It forgets beauty, goodness, worth, everything, save money!"

"And why not that too?" asked Mrs. Mush.

"The thirsty man cannot forget his thirst, nor the hungry man his hunger," replied Mrs. Kennedy; "and so the world, who is both hungry and athirst, remembers money for ever."

"You are a wonderful philosopher, Mrs. Kennedy!" said Mrs. Mush, with mock gravity.

"Granted! I am anything you please, so I have my ball. Now, dear, I must have one, or I'll worry your life out of you!"

"I shall like to be worried by you, my dear," said Mr. Kennedy, smiling.

Blanche nodded sadly, and shook her head.

"Mrs. Mush," she said, "you see and hear my hard case. I have already learned to obey, and not to have my way. I had set my heart on this ball, but the despot says nay, and I yield. Be it so, I shall mope, then!"

She put on a look, and a very becoming one it was, of deep melancholy. Mr. Kennedy bent over her, fond, admiring, evidently charmed with her flippant speech, but more charmed still with her stately beauty. Admiration was in his looks as it was in his heart. And Sybil sat silent and desolate, seeing and listening, and feeling that she was nothing and no one in her father's house.

She had not thought she could be forgotten so quickly, nor that her enemy's triumph could have been so complete. Her lover, her friend, her father, had each proved faithless in turns, not in the same degree, but enough to make her very heart ache. Who would be true to her now? To whom could she look in her sorrow?

"I am afraid your head aches, my dear?" said Mrs. Mush, bending a pitying glance on the poor girl.

"Very much," replied Sybil.

Blanche silently handed her smelling-bottle to Mrs.

Mush, who passed it to Sybil. But Miss Kennedy did not touch the sparkling bauble, worth ten times in value such a present as her father usually brought her. She rose almost vehemently from her chair, and said, in a short, broken voice,

"Thank you — I shall go to bed."

She bade them all a hurried good-night, and left the room. Her father breathed a relieved sigh as the door closed upon her. It was not pleasant to see her sitting there pale and cold and altered. Her presence was a burden; her absence a relief.

Sybil's heart was full to bursting. She stopped on the staircase and leaned her head on the banisters. A step coming down made her look up. It was Mr. Dermot. By the light of a lamp which burned dimly against the wall, he saw bright tears glittering on the face she raised towards him. He bent over her with a look full of concern, and taking her two hands in his stroked them softly.

"Sybil, be brave," he said with deep pity — "bear it better."

"I cannot," sobbed Sybil — "I cannot! She has taken my father from me. There was a time when he came home all smiles and fondness for his child; his hands full of presents as his heart was full of love. And this time he brought me nothing — he scarcely looked at me. I saw he wished me out of the room. Oh, Mr. Dermot: it has come to this!"

"Yes, it is hard," said Mr. Dermot, gently; "and children do not expect it, for they generally forget first."

"No one cares for me now!" moaned Sybil.

"Am I no one?" asked Mr. Dermot, reproachfully. "And have I forgotten you?" he added, producing and raising to her face a bunch of violets, fresh and blue.

"Are they for me?" asked Sybil, evidently pleased.

"Unless you wish me to present the bride with them," he drily replied, "they are for you."

Sybil smiled languidly, but did not take the flowers. Mr. Dermot deliberately took and held them above the wall of the old-fashioned staircase, and said quietly,

"Will you have them? One — two — three."

As he uttered the last word, and opened his hand to drop the flowers, Sybil saucily snatched them from him and ran up the staircase. He turned round and raised a threatening forefinger at her; but Sybil only gave him a defiant little nod as she looked round over her shoulder before she entered her room.

Her first act was to place her flowers in water. But the pleasure this slight gift of his had given her was already over, and behind it remained a dull, aching pain.

"He would never be so kind, if he knew how fond I am of him," she thought. "He takes pity upon me because I am a poor betrayed little creature, and because he likes me in a sort of way; but let another Blanche Cains come in his way, and he will fall in love with her, and forget me as if I had never been. If my own father is already cold and estranged, what will Mr. Dermot be?"

There was truth in these bitter thoughts, but they were none the less bitter for being so true. Sybil

knew, too, that, however hard her fate might be, useless repining could only make it harder to bear. Her nature, though sensitive, was strong, and even in this, the first vehemence of her grief, she resolved upon patience and resignation.

Her back was turned to the door of her room as she stood near her toilet-table undressing; but she heard the door open, she heard, too, the rustle of a silk dress, and in the glass facing her, she saw Mrs. Kennedy's handsome face.

Sybil was half undressed, her hair flowed on her bare arms and shoulders; and on being thus intruded upon, she hastily took up a shawl and wrapped it around her. Blanche Cains was dead, and Mrs. Kennedy was a stranger.

"Sybil," impetuously said her stepmother as she closed the door, "I come to know whether it is to be peace or war between us."

Sybil turned round slowly till she confronted her.

"Neither," was her laconic reply.

"Neither! How so?"

And Mrs. Kennedy sat down unbidden.

"You are my father's wife — I have no intention of being at war with you. You are my false friend — we cannot be at peace."

"That is candid, though not very plain," said Mrs. Kennedy, reddening. "Oh, Sybil — Sybil!" she added, bursting into tears, "is this the love you professed for me?"

"Where is the love you professed for me?" moodily asked Sybil.

"Your father would have married again," said Mrs.

Kennedy; "you must see and feel that. Why is it such a hardship that he took your dearest friend instead of some stranger? True, this marriage has given me a good and kind husband — it has taken me out of poverty into affluence; but you are not mean, Sybil — you cannot grudge me that. Is it so long ago that you devised a hundred foolish plans, the upshot of every one being that we should never part. Now that in the only feasible manner this plan is fulfilled, that we need never separate, you hate your friend. Why so, Sybil — why so?"

She spoke impetuously, and not without genuine emotion — it was very plain that she would rather be the friend than the stepmother. But Sybil smiled drearily.

"If there was no harm in this, why did you hide it from me?" she asked. "Since it was so desirable for me that you should become my father's wife, why did you not become so openly? But you were wronging me, so you did not dare to trust me. And now you expect me to forget the cruelest treachery that was ever wrought from friend to friend. You took advantage of my ignorance, and laughing at my simplicity all the time, you stole my father from me. And it was not love for him that carried you away — you dare not tell me to my face that it was. It was love of fine furniture, and fine clothes, of that silk dress, and those rings, of all that a true woman should scorn. Keep them, enjoy them, and much good may they do you!" said Sybil, her eyes flashing. "You sold yourself for them — with that I do not meddle, it rests between your God and you, but you sold my friendship too, and this I will tell you, there is nothing — nothing

this wide earth holds — will ever purchase it back again. If you had thrown it into the sea, it would not be more lost to you than it is."

Mrs. Kennedy rose.

"Mr. Dermot has been speaking to you," she said, glancing at the violets on the table. "What has he been saying? I will know it — I have a right to know it!"

"Have you?" replied Sybil. "What right, I wonder? There was a time, indeed, when I was so foolish as to lay bare every thought and feeling of my heart to you — but surely that time is over."

"I tell you he has been speaking to you," angrily said Mrs. Kennedy, "and if you will not tell me, he shall."

"He is in the counting-house," coolly replied Sybil. "I see the light burning there, so if you wish to question him you can."

Mrs. Kennedy went to the door. When her hand was on the lock, she turned round and looked at Sybil. There was pride, and humility, and old affection in the look.

"There was a time," she said, and her voice shook slightly as she spoke, "there was a time, Sybil, when you would have remembered not merely your imaginary wrongs, but real and true proofs of friendship. I watched by your bed when you were sick and dying amongst strangers; I was true to you, truer than you think or know. I could have married Count de Renneville if I chose! I did not. Why do you forget these things?"

"I do not forget them," replied Sybil; "but you have ruined them all — you have sown doubt, and

doubt you must reap. I may wrong you, but I do believe that if you were kind and true, it was because it cost you nothing to be so. I cannot help seeing that when I stood in your way you walked over me recklessly."

With a smile of scorn Mrs. Kennedy, replied:

"That is a very convenient way of explaining, and getting rid of kindness and affection."

"I know a way more convenient still," said Sybil, with a steady look; "it is to take advantage of both to crush and ruin the giver. I defy you to say that I ever wronged you. I defy you to say it in the past, and I defy you to say it in the future. I know what my lot in this house will henceforth be, but I submit to it beforehand, with an aching heart I confess it, but with pride enough to abstain from anything like retaliation. From such power as I have to offend or wound you, you are safe — I would scorn to use it."

"You are too good!" ironically said Mrs. Kennedy; "but I suppose I must meet this magnanimous declaration in a friendly spirit. Of course, if your father chides or censures, you will kindly lay it to me."

"No," frankly said Sybil. "I do not think you wish it. I even believe you would like to be kind to me. But I tell you again," she added, her eyes flashing with generous indignation, "that never I will accept the kindness of the friend who betrayed me."

Mrs. Kennedy thought awhile, then said coldly,

"You are young and inexperienced, and therefore harsh and severe. Later you will think differently of all this. I shall always be ready and willing to renew our old affection; but you must take the first step,

Sybil. I have done all that I could do, and far more than your father wished me to do."

Without waiting for any answer, without even looking at Sybil, she left the room.

CHAPTER XII.

THE counting-house was empty when Mrs. Kennedy entered it; but Mr. Dermot had left a light burning on the table, and she knew he would return. She sat down and waited his coming. She was a brave woman, though not a good one. She would defy the enemies she had raised against herself, and face the danger she had called up. She had failed with Sybil, but she was not without hopes of success with her former lover. So she sat, waiting patiently enough, thinking, with a wondering sort of contempt, of the tragic way in which Sybil took all this, and feeling just a touch of regret that she took it thus.

But Blanche Cains was not the woman to linger over such regret. She had not, indeed, anticipated this; her nature was not one of deep thought or much foresight. She liked to go on, pushing others aside, trampling obstacles under foot, but she did not care to ask herself, "What will the cost of victory be?" She was no subtle schemer, though she had a power of deceit without which she could never have prevailed. She had scarcely entered Mr. Kennedy's house, and appreciated its comforts, both actual and contingent, when she had resolved to put Mr. Dermot aside, and marry the father of her trusting friend. Mr. Kennedy did not care for her, and she saw it. What of that?

It would only sweeten victory to subdue this careless rebel. So she spread her net, and when the bird was in its meshes, she closed it, and laughed to herself like a saucy child. He was young enough, and handsome enough, too, for her to like him in a certain way. Besides, he adored her, and would be generous. Of Sybil she thought little, of Mr. Dermot not at all. She disliked him now, and as her pleasure was her rule of life, so were her likings and her dislikings the only code of conscience Blanche Cains acknowledged. For her dear little Sybil, indeed, she felt some slight compunction, but, then, she was half vexed with her too.

"If she loved me as much as she says," thought Miss Cains, "she would have thought of it. Of course she knows her father will marry again. Then why not wish me to be her stepmother? No, she would like me to be her dependant. She would shower benefits on me, I suppose, and kiss and hug me all day long like a lapdog. But it cannot be. However, I will be very kind to her — dear little Sybil!"

To do her justice, Miss Cains had some delightful fancies concerning this prospective kindness. She would be the medium of Mr. Kennedy's love to his daughter. No girl in all Saint Vincent should be attired so exquisitely as Sybil Kennedy. She should have such darling dresses, and such a sweet little room, and when she had a fancy she need only come to her stepmother and tell it to her, and Mrs. Kennedy would coax or worry it out of her husband, for dear little Sybil must be gratified.

All this had been very pleasant to think of, and it was as provoking to find that it would not come to

pass. Sybil's perversity was set up as a barrier between them. She had not loved her after all. It had only been the lapdog affection, and because Blanche would not be a lapdog, Sybil hated her, and looked at her with cold scornful eyes.

Mrs. Kennedy's feelings were too blunt for her anger against Sybil to rise very high. But she was displeased, and her displeasure was akin to dislike. She was a sort of heathen in her way. Not a devout pagan like Socrates, nor one that subdued his passions like Scipio, nor yet such a heathen as Lucretia, who could not survive dishonour. No; but she belonged to that countless multitude who have ever been, and will not cease to be till time is dead. She was one of those who make gods, small or mighty, of their passions, according to the strength and the measure of their nature. For whom the tables of the law were never written. For whom Christ died in vain. Custom, circumstance, hedge in the majority of these from great crimes or weighty sins; many behave pretty much like Christians, and call themselves such. But watch them closely; see how their eager, sensuous natures grasp at every pleasure, at every joy, and forego no temptation. The smallest sacrifice of self is intolerable. The greatest is never thought of. They cannot do it, and they neither admire nor love the foolish ascetic who conquers the flesh, and lays his quivering heart bare beneath God's hand. Why punish oneself so? Was not life given for enjoyment? — are not these self-inflicted pangs the diseased workings of poor sad fanatics? To this creed Mrs. Kennedy had ever practically belonged. There had ever been something in Sybil's passionate, aspiring nature that jarred upon

her. What was that silly girl ever longing for? Why did she ever go beyond the present in some wild dream or other? Why did she rave about books, or people, or things? It was irritating at times, and ever incomprehensible, and at other times it was hateful. For to this day the heathen hates the Christian, who, alas! often hates him. The war of creeds is ever going on — a fierce war often — and always a war of mutual derision and scorn.

Spite this difference in their two natures, Miss Cains had taken a liking to Sybil. She had indulged and petted the young girl at school. She had even watched by her sick-bed, and braved contagion to do so. But then she did not fear this particular disease; indeed, a certain bravery was one of her redeeming traits, and she had found pleasure in Sybil's vivacious adoration. The latter years of Blanche Cains had been bitter. They had overflowed with humiliations and slights, and scorns, which she hated. Against all these Sybil's worship had avenged her. It was soothing to wounded vanity and smarting pride to be the idol of this fervent school-girl. It was pleasant, too, and Miss Cains foresaw that it could lead to much that would be pleasanter still. A friendship based on such grounds was not very likely to prove self-denying, and as she thought over all this, Mrs. Kennedy again thought what a silly girl Sybil must have been, and was still.

The sound of a step roused her from her meditation. The door opened, she turned round, and they were face to face. They exchanged one cold, wary look, and did not speak. At length Mr. Dermot very coldly asked to know Mrs. Kennedy's pleasure.

"I think, sir, you may guess it," was the lady's composed reply. "You have been already sowing discord between my husband's daughter and me, doing what you can to embitter my stay in this house. I come to know your pleasure — am I to leave it, or will you? — one house cannot hold us."

"In that case, I am sorry to say, Mrs. Kennedy, that you must go. I have no intention of leaving this house."

She stared at him, more annoyed than angry.

"Perhaps you will explain yourself," she said after a while, "there need be no riddles between us."

"And why should I explain? — you have only to question your husband, and you will surely know."

"Mr. Dermot, I expected the conduct of a gentleman, but I find I was mistaken."

She rose, and looked grandly scornful.

But Mr. Dermot smiled a cold, unmoved smile. He could be stung, but not by her.

"Of your own accord you released me," she pursued, "and because I took the liberty you gave me, you choose to insult me."

"My dear madam," kindly said Mr. Dermot, "take this friendly advice — offer no excuse where there is no accusation. You were free to bestow your hand on Mr. Kennedy, and you could not bestow it on a worthier man. You have made a good match, too, and pray, who blames you for doing so?"

Blanche looked at him with sparkling eyes.

"You want me to fear you," she said, "but nothing shall make me do that — nothing, do you hear! I defy you — Mr. Dermot, I defy you!"

Mr. Dermot took out his pocket-book, opened it,

and produced a letter. On seeing it she turned ashy pale. At a glance she knew the writing, it was hers — a proof she could not deny was in his hands. No doubt he would take it to her husband, and she must confess her mean deceit. She wondered if she could snatch and tear it from his hand, but no — the attempt was useless, and might be dangerous. So she stood silent, looking at him with moody eyes.

"Inadvertently," said Mr. Dermot, laying grave emphasis on the word, "this letter remained in my hands. I was hesitating whether to destroy it, or return it to you, but by coming here to-night you have removed all doubt."

He placed it on the table before her. She took it up without eagerness, and held it loosely. Why did he care so little about injuring her when he had her so completely in his power? It could not be the old love. Yet there was no harm in trying, so she said softly:

"Thank you, Mr. Dermot."

He looked at her — and no woman could mistake that look. Nothing — no, not an atom of the old love was there. Unless in so far as it might have been useful to her, Mrs. Kennedy had no wish for that same old love — yet that look stung her. She thrust the letter into the flame of the candle, then threw it contemptuously on the hearth, and let it burn there. And still she was not satisfied.

"Mr. Dermot," she said, "you know very well that I can ask my husband for no explanation. I come to you, and you are bound to answer me. Why and how do you remain in this house?"

"Mrs. Kennedy, you must question your husband

or remain in ignorance. Why should he not tell you? — and why should I? There is no past between us — we are strangers — and we met to-day for the first time. Destroy that understanding, and you place yourself in a position of doubt and difficulty. Keep it, and it seems to me that you have only to be happy according to the way you have chosen.”

“Mr. Dermot,” said Blanche, “you are a false bad man, and I hate you! But I have no need to question Mr. Kennedy — you have already told me enough. You are his partner, or something of the kind. Be it so. I shall not crave your mercy, and what is more, I shall scorn to be revenged. You have deceived me all along, but know that, though Mr. Kennedy may be the older and the poorer man, I prefer him still a thousand times to you.”

She walked out of the counting-house without giving him another look. As she spoke so she felt in that bitter hour. She had been deceived, nay, she had been cheated, and she saw it, but her hatred of the deceiver was greater than her resentment of the cheat.

Mr. Dermot had not thought it necessary to inform her that he was richer than she thought, and he had given her no clue to Mr. Kennedy's circumstances. He had let her be caught in this net of her own spreading, and now he laughed at her! Let him! he should not triumph in her regret, nor behold her mortification. She would love Mr. Kennedy to his face, and that should be her revenge.

In this fond mood Mrs. Kennedy entered her room, where her husband was rather anxiously waiting. He thought her with Sybil all the time, and the interview seemed a long one. Had Pussy been coaxed back to

duty by the charmer? He gave her an uneasy look as she came in. Mrs. Kennedy smiled brightly, and went up to him with a pretty, playful, deprecating air.

"Not yet," she said, "not yet. You see she feels sore, but she will come round. Indeed, if there had not been mischief-making, I do believe she would have come round. So in my headlong way I have been to Mr. Dermot in the countinghouse, and scolded him roundly. He, poor man! declares he had nothing to do with it, but seems rather affronted with me. Have I done very wrong? Now don't look so cross, dear, but do tell me how I am to behave to that Mr. Dermot? Is he a clerk — has he a share in the business — what is he here? Why did he not go to Canada?"

Mr. Kennedy was not a communicative man, but she spoke in a coaxing, careless tone. She laid her head on his shoulder in a fond way, that stirred every fibre in his heart — and mastered him. He felt her breath on his cheek, and her white hand softly playing with his hair, and he yielded to this beloved Dalilah.

"My love," he replied, "it is a business secret, and you must not mention it even to Dermot — but the fact is, I have given up this French business to him, and kept the foreign connexion for myself."

Mrs. Kennedy opened her blue eyes in childish wonder.

"Dear me," she said, "is this house his?"

"It will be, my love. The house goes with the mill."

A cold shudder passed through Mrs. Kennedy's heart. She was a matter-of-fact woman, and tangible posses-

sions were all in all to her. What was Mr. Kennedy's foreign connection? It might mean nothing. The house, the mill, the French business were substantial goods, and these were to belong to her discarded lover! She looked at the Cupids on the blue hangings on the walls, at the costly furniture, and the velvet carpets, and they bored her dreadfully. She gazed moodily at the man on whose shoulder her head now rested, and she saw him with changed eyes. How old he looked! — quite old, and there were grey hairs in his beard too, and she was married to him, and perhaps he would be a beggar to-morrow!

"You look tired, love," said Mr. Kennedy.

Blanche roused herself with a little start.

"No, she was not tired, but she was thinking. Would they all stay in this house, suppose Mr. Dermot got married?"

"And suppose he marries Sybil," playfully said Mr. Kennedy, kissing her hand.

It had been the boast of this woman that she was not envious. That boast perished as her husband spoke. Suppose he marries Sybil! She would have grudged her former friend no other husband, but this one she did grudge her in her heart. "What! had she schemed, and plotted, and betrayed; had she sold herself to an old man that these two might scorn her with their love and their money? The thought was hateful, so she smiled and said:

"He will not do for Sybil."

"Why so?"

"You will not tell Sybil I told you?"

"No — what is it?"

"Well, then — you will not tell Mr. Dermot either?"

"No."

"On your word?"

"On my word — what is it?"

"Well, then, he proposed to Sybil, and she would not have him — Sybil herself told me so."

Mr. Kennedy bit his lip, and looked deeply vexed.

"He proposed to Sybil?"

"I believe I am not using the right words — he gave Sybil to understand that he was fond of her, and Sybil as plainly gave him to understand that she was not fond of him. I cannot say what actual words passed — but it was so."

Mr. Kennedy still looked vexed — more than vexed; he took a turn round the room, then came back to his wife.

"Sybil must have him," he said doggedly.

"She shall never have him," thought Mrs. Kennedy, setting her teeth. But with that thought there passed another that chilled her very marrow. Was Mr. Kennedy an all but ruined man, and was this match the only pledge left of his safety?

"But, my love," she said, "is this house really to be Mr. Dermot's — I mean is it a settled thing that he must have it? — suppose you and he disagreed?"

"We shall not disagree."

"Well, but suppose you did?" she persisted.

"If we disagree before a year is out, I resume all my old rights, for our agreement is not to be carried out before then."

Mrs. Kennedy breathed a relieved sigh. A year indeed! A month would do her purpose. So she resumed her pretty coaxing ways, and wrung from Mr. Kennedy a promise that he would not utter a word of reproach to Sybil.

"Mind, not one word," she added.

Mr. Kennedy kissed her fondly, and thought what an angel he had wedded; but for all that he did not tell her that Saint Vincent, and the mill, and the French business were already sold to Mr. Dermot, and that it was out of the purchase-money the handsome room in which they now stood had been furnished. He did not tell her that Saint Vincent had never really been his, but one of those doubtful possessions which men of his speculative turn indulge in. He did not tell her that he had lost thousands since she had first come to the Abbey, that his daughter's fortune was gone, and that for the third time in his life the future was a blank before him.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. KENNEDY was faithful to his promise of not scolding Sybil. But if he did not reprove in words, he had estranged looks and cold language at his command, and he used both unsparingly the whole of the next day. His daughter's pale face and sad eyes did not make him relent, though they moved Mrs. Mush to pity, and stirred the very depths of Mr. Dermot's heart. When, on entering the drawing-room in the evening, he saw Sybil sitting apart, silent and neglected, he went at once and drew a chair near hers. He

caught Mrs. Kennedy's scornful smile, and he saw Mr. Kennedy's half displeased look, and he read, too, an uneasy meaning on Mrs. Mush's face, which meant, "This will lead to no good;" but Mr. Dermot was a wilful man, and not even Sybil's languid and monosyllabic replies could deter him from his purpose. Moreover, he knew how to compel her attention.

"I have brought you a new book," he said, taking a volume out of his pocket and putting it on the table before her. "I think you will like it."

Sybil's face brightened, and she gave him a grateful look; but suddenly her eyes grew dim and her hand shook as it opened the volume. It was very kind of Mr. Dermot, but it was only kindness, and with her father it had once been love. But though Mr. Dermot saw and understood all this, he would not be disheartened in his well-meant effort. Moreover, he liked to guard and avenge this poor little outcast, who had done nothing to deserve her fate, and who, if her father had been just, and her friend true, need never have worn that desolate, heartbroken mien. He knew that it would please neither Mr. Kennedy nor his wife that he should thus devote himself to Sybil, and protest against their unkindness, but little indeed did he care for their displeasure.

The colour returned to Sybil's pale cheeks, and the old gaiety to her voice, and every manly and generous instinct within him rejoiced to think that this was his doing.

"Ah! how good you are," Sybil could not help saying, in a voice too low for the rest to hear, "how very good you are to me!"

"I wish I could be ten times kinder, my good

little girl," he said, casting a look of mingled indignation and scorn at Mr. Kennedy and his wife. He felt no jealousy, no personal resentment, but it was incredible to him that Mr. Kennedy could prefer to a daughter like Sybil a wife like Blanche Cains. All affection partakes of love's blindness, and imagination is a great deceiver. Mr. Dermot had long clothed Miss Cains with all the virtues which can adorn woman, and which a generous heart can conceive. But no sooner did he see his fair mistress daily, than his illusion melted away. She had helped him in a sort of way — she did not care to deceive or keep him. It suited her that he should open his eyes, and cease to love. Jilting him was inconvenient, and she preferred that he should jilt her. The glamour faded from before his eyes, almost abruptly. The enchantress chose to dissolve her own spell, and he knew not the magic art that could restore it. Indeed, loathing and scorn marked his wakening. When he saw how he had been loved, he set her free, and restored every proof of their engagement.

Miss Cains played her cards so well that she carried on a comfortable courtship with the new lover, and a dire though silent quarrel with the old one, unsuspected by either. And now that he saw what her object had been, Mr. Dermot despised her, and, forgetting his own blindness, wondered at his friend's.

"It is amazing, Sybil," he said, looking back to her; "but Time will avenge you."

"I want no vengeance, Mr. Dermot."

"But you suffer, Sybil."

"I cannot help that. The whole day I have heard about that ball of hers. I think, moreover, she has

already expressed twenty extravagant wishes, which it will take much money to gratify, and which are all to be fulfilled. Her whims are laws now — and my father does not even look at me, Mr. Dermot.”

“I wish looking at you would do any good,” said Mr. Dermot rather warmly, “for I like it, Sybil. You have a face which makes the task a pleasure. I don’t mean that you are so amazingly pretty,” he added, smiling; “but faces are like books, pleasing or painful, and I like the story which yours tells me, Sybil.”

Sybil’s fingers shook a little as she went on with her crochet. This kindness of Mr. Dermot’s, which was so unlike love, was both her torment and her happiness. He went on:

“I said that Time would avenge you — why will you not let me forestall or abet time, Sybil? I would gratify your wishes if you would but express them, and no one would or need be the wiser for it. And I should like it, Sybil.”

“No — no — I must not — I dare not,” stammered Sybil. “I have no wishes — I want nothing.”

“From me,” he suggested, looking scarcely pleased.

“Ah! that is not it, indeed, no; but she is my father’s wife, and she has a right, I suppose, to be extravagant. And what right have I to tax you so?”

“The right I give you — Sybil, the best of all rights, it seems to me. Moreover, you have never been extravagant in your desires. It does not take much to please you, or to make you happy, Sybil. A few flowers, a book will do it. Only you will not let me.”

Sybil did not know how to resist him. She felt troubled, happy, and withal wretched. Why was her heart so exacting that it required either more or less kindness? She would have asked no better than to let Mr. Dermot be kind to her, but prudence and pride forbade it. That kindness must cease, alas! it must even be given to another, and she might have to see it. Should she not, then, relinquish it betimes, and deny herself to-day, in order not to be faint and languid to-morrow?

"Well, Sybil?" he said.

And Sybil's reply was the very reverse of that which she intended.

"Yes, as you please," she said.

"What would you like?" Mr. Dermot asked quickly.

Sybil stammered, half frightened, "Nothing."

"Anything," he wanted to insist.

But in the meanwhile Mr. Kennedy was beginning to look displeased, and Mrs. Kennedy grandly disdainful, at this long conference. So good-natured Mrs. Mush thought she might as well interfere. She rose, left her seat, and went up to Mr. Dermot and Sybil.

"You pair of plotters," she said, "what comedy or what drama is it that you are concocting?"

"Do you wish to help us, Mrs. Mush?" asked Mr. Dermot.

"I do not object, provided you undertake the last act. It must be very pleasant to set things going, but oh! the winding up!"

"Oh! ours shall be an historical drama, and you know that in this the winding up is already done."

"Yes, and very grandly, too, sometimes. Take the story of Elizabeth and Mary, for instance."

"I hate Elizabeth," vehemently said Sybil.

"It is all very well to abuse Elizabeth," coolly replied Mrs. Mush, "but what would Mary have done without her?"

"She would have kept her head, Mrs. Mush."

"My dear, I am looking at these two ladies dramatically, and you must confess that tragic end it is which has made Mary famous for ever. And, then, there is something terrible in the aversion of these two women. They never met — it owes nothing to personal contact — no, it is a grand hatred, crossing both space and time."

Mr. Dermot laughed, and confessed it was very fine, and as he saw that Mrs. Mush was resolved to break his *tête-à-tête* with Sybil, he moved away of his own accord. Mrs. Mush remained near her young cousin.

"Little girl," she half whispered, "you must not struggle against fate. It only makes matters worse."

Sybil looked moody, and did not reply.

"And you must not let yourself be comforted so easily," continued Mrs. Mush. "Man is vain, my dear, and too easily elated."

This speech coincided too much with Sybil's secret fears not to move her.

"Oh! I know," she said a little bitterly. "I rely upon nothing and no one, Mrs. Mush."

Mr. Dermot, who was watching them a little uneasily, now came back.

"Mrs. Mush, what are you and Miss Kennedy plotting now?" he asked.

"Treason, to be sure," very calmly replied Mrs. Mush.

But Sybil, who felt restless under Mr. Dermot's look, rose and left the room. He followed her out with her book, which she had left on the table.

"Sybil," he said reproachfully, "I did not overhear Mrs. Mush, but I overheard you. And you said that you relied upon nothing and no one, Sybil."

Sybil's whole heart went back to him. To hear was to believe when he spoke.

"Oh! I rely upon you," she said in a broken voice, "I rely upon you; and even if you weary of kindness, I shall never murmur — I shall never reproach. Good night — say nothing more — good night."

She left him a little abruptly, for she felt her cheek flushing, and her eyes filling with tears, and she was both ashamed and afraid. To say the truth, Mr. Dermot was a little startled. He re-entered the drawing-room, resolved to question Mrs. Mush as he had questioned Sybil; but she gave him no opportunity to do so. She sat near Mrs. Kennedy, and the two ladies and Mr. Kennedy himself were deep in a most important conversation — the ball which was to grace Mrs. Kennedy's appearance in Saint Vincent. Mrs. Kennedy wanted to triumph over her old foes by asking them to her house, and her husband was both too fond and too proud of her to oppose the wish. He too wanted to show the world the prize he had got. Mrs. Kennedy was not more anxious to display her luxurious furniture and her diamonds — they had belonged to Sybil's mother — than Mr. Kennedy to exhibit her blue eyes, blooming cheeks, and white

shoulders to the circle of his friends. Mr. Dermot soon wearied of this topic of conversation, and perceiving he could not speak to Mrs. Mush alone, he left the drawing-room. The night was mild, and he crossed the silent cloister, and went out into the garden. He looked up at Sybil's window. It was dark. She was fast asleep by this, and, childlike, had laid by all her cares on her pillow. Why should he question Mrs. Mush? He knew Sybil, he knew himself, and he would not change one tittle in his behaviour. He would be her friend, her kind and true friend, and if there was sweetness or pleasure in that friendship, why should he not take it?

CHAPTER XIV.

ALL happiness has to be bought, and a heavy price did Sybil now pay for her gay and careless youth. Her other troubles had been unlike this; their bitterness was great, but it was not incessant. It was hard to be betrayed by her betrothed. It was harder still to love a man whose careless liking seemed to forbid hope for ever. But pride cured one grief; and there is a secret balm in the wounds which love inflicts, which will not let them become mortal. Men and women never have died of love, whatever poets may say. Love is life, and would raise and quicken the dead rather than destroy the living.

But there is no soothing power in a betrayed friendship. There is nothing to allay the bitterness of such daily stings as grief, jealousy, and wronged affection now inflicted upon Sybil. Her father's passion,

and the power of Blanche Cains, both seemed to know no bounds, and Sybil had to look on and see it. Ralph, her stepmother's maid, was more powerful in the house than she was now. Her tastes, her likings, were consulted in nothing, and she was nothing and no one. The visitors who came to Saint Vincent — and there was a tribe of them — asked for Mrs. Kennedy, and Miss Kennedy might appear or not at her pleasure. She was not missed, and certainly not wanted. Mrs. Mush was very good-natured; and Mr. Dermot was more than good-natured. His watchful kindness was a constant protest against the cruel change; but he could not alter matters, after all. Moreover, he lived much apart, and was deep in business, whilst Mr. Kennedy was lengthening his honeymoon beyond the usual period. There were days when Sybil scarcely saw him, and either lived alone or sat silent and moody with her stepmother. This happened but seldom. Mrs. Kennedy had at once established her footing in the little town of Saint Vincent. She drove out daily, generally with her husband, and lived in a round of visits and gaieties, from which Sybil was wilfully excluded. Now and then some unexpected and welcome act of kindness from Mr. Dermot broke like a ray of sunshine on the gloom of her life; but it was only now and then, for, as we said, Mr. Dermot was very busy, "and he does not care about me after all," thought Sybil.

And thus time passed till the day of the party came round.

A keen and bitter north wind blew from the sea, and swept over the whole coast. On such a day the shelter of the house is pleasant, and it is a hardship to

go forth. Yet scarcely was breakfast over when Sybil ran up to her room, put on some warm clothing, then went down to the garden, thence proceeded to the grounds, walked there, striving against the blast, until, wearied and exhausted, she sat down on the grassy bank where she had learned for the first time that Mr. Dermot was not her uncle.

She remembered that evening and its splendour. Her passion of grief and wrath at his revelation — but she remembered them as a remote dream. She had lived a whole world since then, and her life was as changed as the aspect of nature itself. No sunset glory did she gaze on now, but a tempestuous sky, where clouds rolled like sea-tossed ships. No azure ocean was this, but a billowy main, beating in wrath and foam against the cliffs.

A quick step made her look round. She saw Mr. Dermot, who, on perceiving her, changed his direction, and came to where she sat.

"Sybil," he said, chidingly, "what are you doing here? Why, child, you are perished, and look like a little ghost."

"I hate the house," said Sybil.

"And therefore come out and make yourself numb in this bitter wind. You might choose some more genial spot. Come on with me."

Sybil yielded apathetically. Mr. Dermot took her arm, and made her walk fast, till they reached a sheltered little nook. A pale sun piercing the clouds shed its light and warmth around them, and a tinge of colour returned to Sybil's cheeks. He asked her how she liked this, and Sybil, smiling, answered that she liked it well.

Pity is said to be akin to love, and in the compassion which now filled Mr. Dermot's heart there was something very like love's tenderness. He felt it, and he knew it. Yes, he would like to take and cherish this poor little wronged one, to give her love and caresses, to gratify her wishes and receive grateful looks and smiles in return. He would like to take and place her beyond the reach of unkind eyes, and feel himself beloved by that true and passionate young heart. It would be something to lead her back to life and joy — a task that would bring its own reward.

"And so you will go on fretting," he said, looking down on her, and half tempted to add, "let me comfort you." "And so you will hate your lot, and not submit."

"I cannot help it," desperately said Sybil; "and Mr. Dermot, would you believe it, that ball of hers makes me mad. I did not think I was so mean; but it is so. I cannot bear to think that she will be admired and flattered to-night, and that I shall be put by as a thing of no worth. Ah, I was not always so. There was a time when I loved her, and I was proud of her beauty; and now, Mr. Dermot — despise me for saying so — now I hate it!"

"No, Sybil, you do not; but you hate her, I fear. Do not, Sybil, do not. It was her poverty did it all. Nature gave her a glorious outside and some good qualities besides, but she forgot to add a heart. Mrs. Kennedy is a fine statue of flesh and blood; one cannot help seeing that she is almost faultlessly handsome in face and person —"

"Do not," interrupted Sybil, turning pale as death.

"I have just told you I cannot bear that she should be admired."

"But I do not admire her, Sybil; and I decidedly admire you," he added, smiling, and raising her hand to his lips as he spoke.

"Ah, now you humble me," cried Sybil, sorely distressed. "I do not want to be admired at all. I never meant that. I do not feel vain now, Mr. Dermot, but I feel wronged and jealous, and I detest her."

"But, Sybil, I cannot help admiring you," said Mr. Dermot, rather warmly. "I am not flattering you, on my word. You are too good to flatter."

There was sincerity in his tone, but there was more in his looks. Very sweet is the admiration of those whom we love, and Sybil felt as if a divine balm had washed her cares away. A glow came over her face, not that of mere modesty, still less of gratified pride, but the lovely glow of a happy heart. She looked so handsome that Mr. Dermot was dazzled and bewitched. His eyes sparkled, he stopped short, and looked down at Sybil, his face overflowed with emotion, words trembled on his lips, then suddenly he dropped her hand, which he had taken, and walked a few steps away, pale and troubled. Mr. Dermot had thought —

"I cannot marry her."

The will, not the power, was wanting — but the will is everything; and Mr. Dermot, though fascinated for a moment, was not in love.

"Sybil," he said, coming back to her, "do not mind me — I am not very well this morning."

Had Sybil guessed the truth? Perhaps she had,

for she smiled sadly, with her eyes bent on the earth, and she turned back to the house.

"Never again, if I can help it," she thought, "shall I meet Mr. Dermot alone. I cannot trust him. He admires me just enough to commit himself, and he does not know that I would scorn to take advantage of such admiration. Of course he is too honourable to trifle with me; but even if he wished it, he could not do it — I should detect truth from falsehood now, or, rather, love from mere liking."

"Sybil, you seem displeased with me," said Mr. Dermot, uneasily.

"I am displeased with myself," replied Sybil, very gravely; "not with you, Mr. Dermot."

She walked away, evidently not wishing him to follow her; and he respected that wish and remained behind.

Mr. Dermot was not accustomed to let his feelings carry him away, and he wanted to think over and examine the sudden emotion which had so nearly mastered him. He was not in love with Sybil, and could not well fancy himself so. He liked this delightful little wild-flower, but he did not care to gather it. Wearisome to him was the mere thought of wedded life, and of the whole matrimonial routine, which, seen from the shores of celibacy, is so uninviting. Besides, why marry when so many struggles and cares lay before him?

Thus spoke Prudence; but with Prudence came another speaker, whose voice was not less selfish perhaps than hers, but was at least infinitely more seducing. It told of a fond young Sybil, who would greet him

with bright eyes and a kiss, who would clasp young white arms around his neck, and let him sleep his cares away on her bosom. Mr. Dermot was no cynic. He loved woman for the sense of sweetness and repose which the man who loves a true woman finds in her companionship. He was no Stoic either, and that ideal woman lost none of her attractions for wearing Sybil's shape, and looking at him with Sybil's impassioned dark eyes. When he thought of her in that relation to himself, he felt with a thrill that it would be very sweet to have her. But not to have her coldly. Mr. Dermot would not care for mere matrimonial barter. If he was to think of Sybil as a wife, it must be as a wife adoring and beloved; and this thought brought him back to the very point whence he had started — was it possible? — nay, more, was it desirable?

“What a pity men and women cannot discuss some questions in perfect frankness,” thought Mr. Dermot. “What a pity I could not say to Sybil awhile back, ‘I am not in love with you; but say that you can love me, and in five minutes, ay, in five seconds, it will be done. You see I am a drowning man. He has ceased to care for that sweet shore called Love — he drifts away into indifference out of very hopelessness; but show him green land again, and he will strain every nerve to reach it. Tell me, Sybil, that I can be loved, and see if I will not love! Say this, and such as you are in sickness or in health, for better or for worse, I will take you. If you are ill, I will tend you; if you are querulous, I will bear with you; and if we are poor, I will toil for you. You shall be flesh of my flesh, and heart of my heart. I will love you in blooming youth, and beyond youth and its bloom; and,

Sybil, tell me if woman can expect, or if man can give more?"

But, alas! it was impossible to hold such language to Sybil. No courtship could begin with such frankness, no girl could tolerate it. Love contingent is not man's privilege. His passion, when declared, must be full-born, and not embryo. All this Mr. Dermot knew — he knew more, too; and with an impatient sigh he resolved to think no more about it.

But that he should think of it was decreed.

The preparations for Mrs. Kennedy's ball were made on a grand scale, and had been going on for a week past. All this Sybil had seen, and known, and had hated with the cordial hate of the young. But when, on leaving Mr. Dermot, she entered the house and went to the library, her indignation rose at the sight she there beheld. Mrs. Kennedy had suddenly decided that this was to be the ball-room. To hear was to obey with her husband. To give the room due width, he ordered the shelves of books to be ejected, and the books themselves to be conveyed to a garret upstairs. In the midst of the noise, dust, and confusion, Sybil entered unheard. At a glance she saw why and how this was taking place. This room had once been hers; here she had spent her happiest hours alone, or, in the days of Uncle Edward, with her father and Mr. Dermot; and now it was taken from her; this pleasant refuge was desecrated and destroyed, her loved companions were banished, and she must look on and be silent!

"You had better not stay here in the dust, Sybil," shortly said her father, catching sight of her pale face, and resenting its meaning. "If you will prepare your

dress for to-night, you will please me far more than by moping here."

"I have nothing to get ready," coldly replied Sybil.

Mr. Kennedy reddened; he had not troubled himself about his daughter's attire this time, whilst for the last week the house had known nothing but Mrs. Kennedy's blue glacé, trimmed with white. He turned away without a word, whilst Sybil tenderly gathered a heap of dusty tomes from the floor, and took them up to their new abiding-place. It so happened that whilst she was thus engaged, Mr. Dermot, wanting a volume, learned, with as little satisfaction as Sybil, that the garret was now the library. He went up to seek the book he required, and unexpectedly found Sybil there.

She did not hear him pushing the door open, and he entered the garret unseen. She sat on a low stool, her elbow on her knee, her cheek on the palm of her hand, her look resting disconsolately on the bookstrewn floor. The window was wide open, and framed a spring landscape, with a blue sky, from which the stormy clouds had passed away. It also let in the spring sunshine, which fell on the dusty volumes, and on Sybil's bright young head, with equal impartiality. These worm-eaten books, written by men whose flesh had long been dust, were as much to the careless sunbeams as the fresh young beauty.

"What a pity such a glorious young creature should ever die!" thought Mr. Dermot, with a sense of pain.

Oh! Death — what is death, Mr. Dermot? — Time, not death, is the destroyer of youth and beauty. He

came forward, and Sybil, hearing him, looked up with a little start.

"Well, what are you doing here?" he asked, gaily — "is this your study now?"

"It will be," replied Sybil — "these books stay here. Mrs. Kennedy wants the library for the ball-room."

Mr. Dermot drew an old, worm-eaten chair from a corner, and sat down on it, facing Sybil.

"Would you like them back again in their places?" he asked. "Well, imagine I am the Fairy Prince, and you poor little Cinderella, and let me get them back for you."

Sybil did not answer.

"What shall I get for my pains?" asked Mr. Dermot.

"The glass slipper, if you like it."

"Glass slippers must be cool wear, not to speak of their fragility; but seriously; do you wish to have these books back?"

"Seriously, I care nought about it; they have been taken away — that pained me — to have them put back would not undo that pain."

Mr. Dermot was the master of Saint Vincent. He wondered if Sybil would like to be mistress with him? He wondered how she would like to share that sweet empire of home, extending from the garret where they now sat to the utmost limits of the garden. He wondered how she would like him to adorn her and load her with gifts, and make her life a long holiday, like that of Blanche Cains? Thought travels fast, and Mr. Dermot's thoughts had journeyed very far indeed since Sybil and he had parted. His meditations had proved

seed cast in a soil ready for them, and their growth was quickened by Mr. Dermot's self-questionings. It is dangerous for a man whose heart is free to ask himself how far he likes an attractive girl in whose society he lives daily, and it is doubly dangerous for him to do so when he is in her actual presence, as Mr. Dermot was now in Sybil's. Cool men of the world, indeed, are armour-proof against such temptations; but Mr. Dermot was neither cool nor worldly. He had just escaped from the toils of an unworthy passion, but he knew that Sybil was pure and true, and that love bestowed on her was worthily given. But would she have it? Would she like to be petted, and ruled, and caressed like a darling child? Would this view of marriage, which the difference in their years suggested, be as acceptable to her as its vague prospect was pleasant to him? All this passed very swiftly through his mind as he sat looking at Sybil, but he should speak, so he said gaily:

"You will dance to-night, of course?"

"No, indeed."

"Not even with me?"

"Not even with you, Mr. Dermot," she curtly replied. "I must appear at that ball, of course — but no power can make me dance."

Mr. Dermot did not insist, but he half smiled to himself as he heard the stern declaration. He resolved that Sybil should dance, and dance with none but himself.

"What will you wear?" he asked.

"Oh! white muslin, of course."

A fair young Sybil, robed in vapoury white tissues, rose before his mind's eye, and charmed it.

"You look wonderfully well in white, with roses," he said admiringly.

Sybil felt uneasy, and wanted to go. He guessed it, and detained her.

"Just a few minutes," he entreated; "this is a Godsend, you know. I never see you alone."

Sybil, who had half risen, sat down again. She knew she should not have done so, that she had no right to stay there with Mr. Dermot. But we do not always do that which we know to be right, and the temptation was strong even as the harm seemed little. But she soon repented having yielded to his request. Mr. Dermot said little or nothing, but Sybil soon felt that he was studying her as if she were the book he had come up to read. And so she was a book to him just then, a very fair, perplexing book, and he would have given much to turn over a few of its pages. But, unluckily, Sybil was not willing, and no Egyptian hieroglyphic is harder to read than a reluctant girl. There is a wildness in the instinct of youth, and a secrecy in that of womanhood, which, combined, are enough to defy a man's wisdom. Mr. Dermot was baffled, and he felt it.

"I must bide my time," he thought.

As he made no motion to let her go, but sat in abstracted silence between her and the door, Sybil rose.

"Please to let me pass," she said.

He rose leisurely, and as she went by him and slipped out of the room, he looked after her, and listened to her little quick step going down. Mr. Dermot shook his head. No, it would never do. She was too young. And yet it was a pity. No longer

caring for the book he had come to seek, he, too, went downstairs.

CHAPTER XV.

MUCH thought, and care, and consideration had been bestowed by Mrs. Kennedy on this her first party. She had superintended the ball-room, the supper-table, the selection of the guests, and her own toilette, all important items, with zeal, tact, and prudence. She had taken every means to ensure the success of this her greatest undertaking, and it is gratifying to declare that her foresight and industry received their reward. The ball-room was pronounced delicious, the supper exquisite, the people delightful, and Mrs. Kennedy's pale blue silk, and pearls, and diamonds something beyond describing. And in that gay scene who thought of Sybil? She saw the homage which had once been hers transferred to her smiling and handsome step-mother. She saw herself neglected and alone, or so coldly recognized that no recognition would have been sweeter. She would not wait for more insult, for so, poor child! she called this little worldliness, and before the dancing began she withdrew to the drawing-room, where the deserted card-tables as yet vainly waited for devoted whist-players.

There she sat alone, unmissed and wretched. Presently the orchestra struck up. There came with the music pleasant sounds of girlish voices and low laughs — a vague murmur which once had filled Sybil's heart with delight. That time was gone. Very sad had been her experience of life for the last year. Her

lover had proved false; her friend had betrayed her. She had given her love to a man who loved another woman, and who, even when he ceased to love, felt nothing for her beyond friendship. Her father's affections had grown cold, and the world itself had forsaken her. Who heeded her absence to-night? — no one!

A door opened, and Mr. Dermot entered the room. He had missed her at once, and he now came for her. His looks told her so, even before his words confirmed it.

"Sybil, what ails you?" he said anxiously.

"My head aches."

"Are you sure of it, Sybil?" he asked, sitting down by her.

Sybil did not answer.

"I think it is your heart that aches. I even think it aches very bitterly just now."

"And yours, Mr. Dermot?"

"I am cured, Sybil."

She looked at him a little moodily.

"I wish I could cure you," he resumed. "I think I could if you would let me."

"How so?"

"I would prove she is not worth regretting, for instance."

"I know it; but it is not Blanche Cains I regret — it is the friendship."

"Take another friend."

"Will you take another love?" asked Sybil, her dark eyes flashing.

Mr. Dermot hesitated, and even coloured a little. He was very much inclined to take another love

just then; but he was not sure enough of it to say so.

"If I could find a true heart," he answered at length, "I know what I should do. But that is not the question. I offer you a true friend — why not take him?"

There was a persuasive tenderness in his voice which stirred the depths of Sybil's heart.

"I do not refuse your friendship," she said; "but ——"

"No 'buts,' Sybil. I know very well you will not come to me with your crochet, and show me 'that sweet stitch,' nor will you open your whole heart to me as you would to a sister-like friend; but for all that we can be friends — true friends; and I wish you would let me begin my office by comforting you. You are getting thin — I fear you have sleepless nights. It is a mortal pity, Sybil, to waste youth and good looks for that false lady. Now, you know, your head does not ache. Why should you not dance and hunt away care for to-night? Confess that music sounds very tempting."

Alas! the temptation was not in the waltz of Strauss. It was in his kindness, in his looks, in his voice and its tones, so tender and so true, which melted all Sybil's bitterness away. Sybil felt ashamed that these few words of his should change as they did the current of her thoughts, and substitute, as if by magic, joy to grief — serenity to discontent. She felt ashamed, for she thought —

"It is all his goodness; he does not care for me, but it is all his goodness."

Sybil little suspected that goodness and Mr. Dermot

had nothing to do with each other just then. He was making a venture. He was trying to succeed as a friend before he assumed, if ever he did assume, the part of a lover. He did not think Sybil so very young and so very childlike now, and it seemed a pity to reject this fair young creature without giving himself a chance of her. That her fancy for Count de Renneville was over, he knew, and also that it had never been more than a generous, romantic girl's fancy. And yet she who had been capable of it — she who now bewailed so passionately the loss of her false friend — was not heartless or cold. It would be pleasant — more than pleasant, it would be happiness both exquisite and deep — to waken that sleeping heart and divert it from foolish and useless repining to the fervour of a true love. True, it might not be possible — not possible at least to him — but the chance was worth the trial, even though that trial itself was not without its dangers. Of these Mr. Dermot was quite aware. He knew that in the pursuit he was now engaged in, the heart that was sought had not always been won, and the heart that was seeking had sometimes been lost. He knew it, but he was willing to run the risk for the sake of the gain; and he began his enterprise by trying both to please and to rule the wayward girl he wished to win. He little knew how easy was the task, nor how his work was already done. So he did his best according to the fashion of his kind. He dropped the rather abrupt kindness of his manner, and substituted for it, by fine, graduated changes, a manner friendly still, but respectful, and more tender than kind. It was this change which Sybil felt at once — it was this which accomplished, without effort, part of his double purpose.

Mr. Dermot was determined to make Sybil dance, with himself, of course, and he again derided the headache and bade her listen to the music. Poor Sybil could not resist him. Every fibre of her being seemed to yield as he spoke, and when he rose and gave her his arm, as a matter of course, she took it with a thrill of happiness, and a blush of mingled joy and shame.

They entered the ball-room quietly. It was gay, bright, and pretty. No sooner was this waltz over than another began, and Sybil and her partner were in it.

It is an easy task for a man to make himself agreeable to the girl who loves him. Mr. Dermot did his best, and for the time being, at least, he made Sybil — though he was far from suspecting it — supremely blest.

“I know I shall be wretched to-morrow,” she thought, “but never mind, I am happy to-night.”

That she had put by her cares, Mr. Dermot saw plainly. Her cheeks had got back their roses, and their sunny lustre had returned to her dark eyes. She was the prettiest girl in the room. None with whom he compared her seemed to him to compete with this maiden flower. Mrs. Kennedy was by far handsomer, but she had not those happy young eyes, nor those childlike parted lips, nor that supple grace of motion. They danced together for the best part of the evening; and when Sybil, frightened at the cold look of her stepmother, asked to rest, Mr. Dermot danced with no one else, but sat by her and kept her company. Of course there were plenty of people who saw this, and secretly drew their conclusions; but Mr. Dermot

did not care, and Sybil, who did care, was far from imagining that these conclusions might not be very wide of the truth. Old familiarity, the certainty of his indifference, deceived her. If Mr. Dermot had been in love with her indeed, she would soon have found it out. But this test was wanting. The touchstone would not apply. Mr. Dermot was not in love yet, though we will not answer for the future. Love comes in many ways. Sometimes it subdues and conquers without a warning, and sometimes again it takes you by the hand and gently leads you along until your bondage is completed. Amongst those who watched and conjectured, was Mr. Kennedy. He observed his wife, his daughter, and his friend. He saw something in Mrs. Kennedy's face which he did not like — a sort of haggard look, which all her smiles could not disguise. He saw little Sybil's enraptured eyes, and could read or guess their story. Mr. Dermot's countenance, too, had its tale. A contentment, a pleasure, and a hope were there, which Mr. Kennedy scarcely expected so soon. But then whispered paternal pride, Sybil was so charming! But Mr. Kennedy's was no unmixed joy. Was what he saw the cause of his wife's secret torment? It put him in a parching fever to think of it. He resolved to know the truth, and to know it at once.

The supper was over, the guests were gone, and Mr. Dermot's low and kind good-night still rang in Sybil's ears, filling her poor little foolish heart with bliss, when her father's voice arrested her as she was going upstairs.

"Come in here — I want to speak to you," he said, opening the door of the vacant drawing-room.

Sybil obeyed. Mr. Kennedy closed the door carefully, and began without preamble.

"Mr. Dermot was very attentive to you this evening."

Sybil started at so unexpected a remark.

"You danced with no one else. Has he proposed to you?"

"No," stammered Sybil, turning crimson.

"What, neither this evening nor at any other time?"

"No — never."

Sybil was truth itself — so it was his wife who had told the lie.

"But have you not had reason to believe that he might do so?"

"Never," said Sybil again.

Mr. Kennedy's lip quivered. For a moment he forgot Sybil, and he saw himself the duped and deceived husband; but he caught his daughter's wondering glance and he smiled.

"Well, Sybil," he said, "I believe that Mr. Dermot does mean to propose to you — mind, he has not told me so — but I believe it; and if he should do so, I wish to tell you beforehand that you cannot please me better than by accepting him."

He looked at her shrewdly; but there was little need. Sybil's blushing, guilty face required no comment. He sighed heavily. His wife was jealous of his daughter, and his daughter loved the man who, for all he knew, loved his wife. It was very dreary.

"That is all I had to say to you, Sybil," he resumed, in a dull tone; "I lay no constraint upon you — I promise nothing for him — you are both free. But if his

attentions do not please you, do not accept them, as you did to-night. Good night, child — sleep well, if you can."

Sybil went up and kissed his cheek. He scarcely heeded the caress. Father and daughter slept but ill that night. One lay awake in a fever of wrath, jealousy, and brooding revenge, and the other, tossed on billows of uneasy bliss, could not close her eyes for excess of happiness. He loved her! — for thus she construed her father's words — he loved her! Was that why he had so soon been cured of his grief for Blanche Cains? — was that his meaning when he told her to marry? Oh! life — sweet, delicious life!

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. KENNEDY'S ball had proved no particular source of enjoyment to Denise. This discreet hand-maiden held dancing in horror. She was always amazed, she was, that so fatiguing an exercise was taken as a pleasure by sensible people. Moreover, her new mistress did not stand high in her good graces, and, to crown all, a terrible deal of cleaning and sweeping was the inevitable result, and Denise resented extra work as a personal injury.

She was full of her wrongs on the morning that followed the day of the party, when a voice from the cloister made her look out of the open window. She saw the postman, who handed her a packet of letters, and hurried away. One of these letters was large and square, and Denise, who did not know how to read,

was turning it over curiously, when Sybil came in upon her, looking as radiant as a sunbeam.

"Well, what are you poring over these letters for?" she asked, gaily — "you want me to read the directions? These are for papa, Denise, and this big one is for Monsieur Dermot, and there is none for me, so good morning."

She lightly climbed up on the window-sill, and jumped down into the cloister. It was full of sunshine, as Sybil's heart was full of gladness. She skipped across it, singing as she went. She ran down a garden path, blithe as any bird. The verdure of spring was around her. April softness was in the air, and in the pearly sky.

"Oh! I am so happy!" thought Sybil; but suddenly she caught sight of Mr. Dermot, and, afraid of him, more afraid of herself, she ran away before he could reach her. She had slipped so cunningly between the hedgerows, that Mr. Dermot never suspected her escape until he entered the path where he hoped to find her. He cast a disappointed look around him — a look which from the spot where she was hiding, Sybil could see, and whilst he searched for her in one direction, she glided away in another.

Mr. Dermot did not break his heart for her absence. He sat down on a bench, took out a cigar, and smoked, and thought over it all once more. His mind was all but made up, and his only wonder was that so pleasant a conclusion to thirty odd years of celibacy had not occurred to him earlier. Sybil was delightful, and though, of course, she could not be fond of him yet, it would be very hard if, with all his opportunities, he could not make her so. Mr. Dermot's cigar was out,

and he had plenty of work waiting for him within; but this day-dream was very sweet. It was like the morning, cloudless and fair, and he could not leave that pleasant spot. A step on the gravel path roused him. It was Denise with the letter. Mr. Dermot said not a word as he took it, but he felt a presentiment of evil.

"If it be so," he thought, ere he broke the seal, "I shall give her up."

The letter was from Mr. Dermot's Irish lawyer, and was significant and brief.

"SIR,

"A fair young man came to the 'Moonagh Herald Office,' yesterday, and asked for all the numbers of that paper for last July. If I learn more, I shall let you know.

"Yours, &c.,

"JOHN O'KEEFE.

"P.S. — The young man seemed disappointed to get none."

Mr. Dermot bit his lip, and tried to feel calm, but he could not. Anger, powerless, though bitter, possessed him. At length he compelled himself to think soberly over it all. His first thought was for Sybil. The peril which had slept awhile had risen anew.

"Good-bye, Sybil," thought Mr. Dermot, with a pang; "you are a fine pearl in a rare setting, and I was covetous, and thought to call you mine, and wear you, but it cannot be."

And Mr. Dermot was right. It could not be. A very dark cloud hung over his life just then; he could

not bring his poor little Sybil, so gentle, so tender, so softly reared, within the vortex of that lowering storm. But it was hard, and his heart ached. With that pang came another thought. He had not gone very far with Sybil, but still his conscience told him that he had taken a few steps on the road of courtship. If she had not perceived it, others had. What would they say to Sybil? Would they accuse him? and would she believe them? Why not speak openly to her? — as openly, at least, as he could? Rather eagerly Mr. Dermot came to the conclusion that it would be wise to do so. If he had searched into the cause of that eagerness, he might have found hope, secret and remote; but he was more anxious to act than to question himself just then, and guessing where he should find Sybil, he forthwith went to seek her.

Sybil had taken refuge in the garret. Her heart was full of a feeling in which pain blended, for it was too tumultuous for happiness. She sat with the books around her, and one lay open on her lap; but Sybil was not reading its pages. She was turning a leaf in her own book, and she could not weary of its meaning. Fairy tales had come true for her, after all, and there was magic in life, and sweet romance. Mr. Dermot's new manner confirmed her father's words. But Sybil wondered when and how it would be. Had it been coming long to him as to her? She knew he had always admired her — what girl does not know that? — had that admiration any share in his ready renunciation of Blanche Cains? Oh! what a sweet, avenging thought that would be! — what a balm to all her wrongs! Not that she wished him to have been faithless, but yet, if he could have liked Blanche less for

her sake, she would not mind it. What would he say, she wondered, when it came to the point of speaking between them? Sybil was almost frightened at the thought. Her own heart was full to overflowing, only she was a girl, and must be silent. He, the man, could speak — what would he say? Not much, she fancied, but a few deep-felt words, which she would remember for ever.

As she came to this conclusion, the door opened, and Mr. Dermot stood before her. His face told Sybil why he had sought her here. Her heart leaped in her mouth, and she felt herself turning crimson, but she sat with her back to the light; he could not see her well — at least, she hoped so. Mr. Dermot drew the old broken chair forward, and sat down by her without a word. Now that it had come to the point, he found it very hard not to speak — but to give her up! He might search long before he found another girl like her — so genuine, so bright, so pretty, too. This dream of a day had already taken so strong a hold of him, that he could not bear to relinquish it. But he caught Sybil's surprised look, and feeling he must say something, Mr. Dermot glanced at the book on her lap. It was a volume of Tasso's. At once Mr. Dermot, who had a fluent tongue, grew eloquent upon the unhappy poet.

"But he should never have loved Leonora," he added, rather sadly; "there are men to whom love is forbidden, Sybil," he added, taking her hand — "do you remember asking me last night if I would take another love?"

"Yes," replied Sybil, with a beating heart, "I do."

"Well, then, shall I tell you what that question

suggested? It suggested, or rather, it confirmed a thought which was haunting me — namely, that it would be very sweet to have a love like you. It was a temptation, Sybil, for this morning brings me tidings which bid me overcome it. I must leave this place — leave you for a time — perhaps for ever. My lot has suddenly grown so dark, that I like you far too well to have you, even if you would have me, Sybil.”

The hand which he held trembled, then turned like ice within his clasp. A grey paleness spread over Sybil's face; her white lips quivered. The shock of so cruel a disappointment conquered her self-command. In a second Mr. Dermot saw it all; his heart gave a great throb, like that of a man who has found a sudden treasure on his path. There seemed to rush before his eyes a mist, in which her image trembled. On rash and burning wing came passion, suddenly fanning into flame the secret fire which had hidden in his heart so long. Sybil, Sybil, had you loved him all this time, and suffered for him? The thought enchanted him, for love is cruel, and this unsought boon of a wayward girl avenged Mr. Dermot for ever on Blanche Cains. What cared he now for her treason, and his trust betrayed? Sybil, young, lovely, and proud, had loved him!

Sybil by this had recovered the composure which never long deserts a true woman. She drew her hand from his, and said, calmly:

“Feel no uneasiness, Mr. Dermot, and take no blame to yourself. You are, and have ever been, quite free.”

She looked very calm and cold. His face fell.

“And you do not want to know what new trouble this is that is coming to me now, Sybil?”

"No," she replied, rising, and going to the door — "that is your business, not mine."

She met the look of keen reproach which he cast towards her. Her hand trembled on the lock. Love and pride had a fierce battle in her heart; then love so far conquered, that, without looking at him, she said:

"I am sorry for your trouble — what more can I say?"

"Nothing, Sybil," he replied, a little reproachfully — "Trouble and I are old friends. Thirty-one years this day have we been acquainted."

"Your birthday!" said Sybil — "this is really your birthday?"

"What about it, Sybil? — what are our birth-days once youth is over? Ah! then, indeed, each is a new gate to a new world; but later they may come and go — we heed them not. We know that closed for ever is the door which let us in to hope, to desire — to all which life does not yield twice to man."

"And does he feel so?" thought Sybil, sadly.

He caught her look, and answered it.

"Yes, Sybil; but for all that, I too could be young again, for, after all, I am not so old but I could take a few steps back, and drink, if need be, from the fountain of all youth. But *cui bono*? I could not do so without bitter sorrow to myself and to others — better remain as I am for ever, Sybil!"

She did not speak — what could she say?

"Come, be my casuist, and resolve me this," he said, rising, and going up to her. "Imagine my case yours; say that there is a dark spot in your life which, though hidden now, may appear some day; and tell

me, such being the case, whether you must live alone, or bind your lot to that of another?"

Sybil understood him very well. She turned pale as death, but she answered, firmly:

"I should do my duty, Mr. Dermot."

"Well, then, Sybil, pity me," he said, with much emotion, "for I cannot do mine. Duty bids me be silent, and love bids me speak. Sybil, I love you, and do not know how to give you up. This trouble may be but a passing cloud, and if it should indeed pass away, will you not let me remind you of to-day and last night?"

His voice was very sweet — very persuasive; his look overflowed with fond entreaty. Oh! if Sybil had dared, how she would have cried, "Let me share all your troubles!" But she would not say it, so she replied —

"No, Mr. Dermot, we must not talk of this again. It was a fancy, or the first wind of trouble would not have quenched it. It was a temptation, and you overcame it — I must be more than either fancy or temptation to the man who wishes for me. Above all, he must not doubt his power of making me happy — no, indeed, Mr. Dermot, he must not."

She spoke with a touch of her old sauciness, for she felt sure of him. His old admiration had ripened fast into tenderness. His old liking had melted into love, and Sybil saw it very well. He had begun their explanation by claiming his liberty, and he had ended it by laying that liberty at her feet. It was a flame, indeed, which had been caught from the fire of her own heart, and Sybil guessed it; but what of that? — some one must love first, and what she had begun he

should end, or she would never have him. In that spirit she spoke, and Mr. Dermot liked her none the less for it.

"You are right, Sybil," he said, "to set a high value on yourself, but you can never set it higher than I do."

"Ah! you are too kind to me!" cried Sybil — "do not — do not! I am not good enough to bear it."

"I want you to be very kind to me too, some day," said Mr. Dermot, smiling, "so I begin first."

Sybil began to get a little frightened. This seemed very like actual love-making, and she was not sure of her fortitude. It might be jest as yet to him, but it was very deep earnest to her. But she rallied, and half in jest, half in earnest, she said:

"If you want me to be kind, that is not the way."

And opening the door, she half went out.

"Stay," he said, detaining her — "if that is not the way, what is?"

"Oh! you must find that out," replied Sybil, gaily, though her heart rather beat as she uttered the daring speech.

She said it gaily, but her heart was full as she turned away quickly, for what if he should never care to find it out, after all. But he did care — he did care infinitely, though he had self-command enough not to detain her. The knowledge that he was beloved had wakened into young and fervent life his wearied and slumbering heart. Oh! if he could but have conquered every obstacle, and consumed time, as fire consumes and devours whatever we throw into it. He paced that lonely garret with troubled steps, remembering how he had found her there — how her little cold hand had

lain dead within his — how, if he had wished it, she would have given herself to him there and then. A book, which nearly made him stumble, changed his thoughts. It was Tasso, which had fallen from Sybil's lap on the floor. Mr. Dermot picked up the little volume, and smiled as he put it in his pocket. For, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, he thought of the day — a speedy one, he hoped — when he would return it to her with a kiss.

And the cloud, and the storm that threatened him, and the enemy who was perhaps on the watch to ruin him in honour and fame — had Mr. Dermot forgotten them? He had not, but scorn and hope combined in him now, he felt defiant and reckless.

“Let her,” he thought, as he passed Mrs. Kennedy's door, and heard her laughing within — “let her, the traitress! I will love, and marry Sybil Kennedy, and she shall look on and see it!”

CHAPTER XVII.

THE future rarely fashions itself according to our fears, or to our desires. When she was once more alone, Sybil felt as if she must have dreamed, not heard and spoken, all that had passed between herself and Mr. Dermot. How unlike her hopes was their fulfilment! How different from her imaginings the reality!

“And yet,” whispered a sweet voice, as she sat in her room, her heart still beating with mingled doubt and joy — “and yet, remember his look when you parted. Remember last night and the day when you and he walked by the beach, and yesterday in the

garden, too. Remember Mrs. Mush. He has long been on the brink of love, and if he long hesitated to cross it, why, the greater, the surer your victory."

But vanity and her triumphs had no hold over Sybil's heart.

"I do not care about victory," she thought, "but I want to be loved, and loved infinitely, and for ever. It would make me none the happier if his pride were humbled in the dust, but I should like him to want me, and not to be able to do without me. I know he likes me — I know he admires me — but I know, too, he could do without me any day, and I cannot endure the thought."

But many are the voices which speak to a girl's heart. And one, a subtle one, which spoke in whispers, and scarcely seemed to use language, so faint were its suggestions, now said that since there was liking, and admiration, and the will to love, Sybil could help all these to ripen into affection, enduring and strong. But how so? And then came dreams of wonderful goodness, and sweetness, and tender and meek bearing; but alas for the logic of her years! Then, also, came to Sybil the firm resolve and will of being as handsome as she could. The task is not easy to all, for to some Nature is a step-mother, but to Sybil she had been gracious. She looked at herself in the glass, and blushed as she looked, and, though alone, half-turned away in secret shame.

"And if I am pretty, and if he sees it, and likes me for it, can I help prizing his liking?" she thought, in self-justification.

But across this smote another thought, sudden and bitter. What trouble was it that threatened him now,

and might, perhaps, sunder them for ever? She had refused to know, and now she could not go and ask him. The friend was gone for ever, and the lover was not yet her own. Chill and dreary came to Sybil the conviction that she was very far from Mr. Dermot, after all. But when did love and youth linger over gloomy thoughts whilst there was room for hope? He had not told her from what quarter his trouble came, but Sybil knew it. It must be from Blanche Cains. Oh! if she could help him — if she could watch, or guard, or foresee! If she could do ought to help or to save him!

“Why not? — why not?” she thought, walking up and down her room in an excited mood. “She deceived me once, not so much because I was foolish as because I was trusting; but I have cleverness enough to read through her now. Why should I not try? I know Mr. Smith is in it. Well, then, nothing that concerns Mr. Smith shall pass in this house without my knowledge.”

A little reflection might have convinced Sybil that as Mr. Smith's name had not been mentioned in Saint Vincent for weeks, and even months, her resolve, however earnest, was not very likely to assist Mr. Dermot out of his trouble. But Sybil forgot this. She only felt her own eagerness and strong will, and began her watching that very moment.

Ever since her return to Saint Vincent, Mrs. Kennedy had lived in a round of gaieties, and worked her way up as the acknowledged star of that little world. She rapidly rose in Mrs. Ronald's favour, and supplanted Sybil without trouble. That lady coolly set Sybil aside, and covertly expressed her disapprobation of

Miss Kennedy's sad looks. She liked rebellion and disobedience under no shape, she said, and Miss Kennedy required some friend to remind her of her duty. That friend she once or twice attempted to be, to Sybil's scarcely concealed wrath and indignation. Now, whilst Sybil was in her room, Mrs. Ronald was in the drawing-room below, and Sybil knew it. At another time this would have been reason sufficient for Sybil to stay upstairs, but in her present mood she felt impelled to go down, and down she went.

Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy were with their visitor; both were very cheerful. Mrs. Mush helped to entertain the autocrat of Saint Vincent, and Mrs. Ronald was gracious and rather condescending; whilst her companion, Miss Spencer, nursed the dog and was mute. They both acknowledged Sybil with a cool politeness, which showed her once more what she was now in her father's house. She sat a little apart, listening and watching, but the conversation ran all on last night's ball, and the guests.

"I wonder how they will look if I talk of Mr. Smith?" thought Sybil, and without taking time to hesitate or reflect she suddenly said,

"I missed Mr. Smith."

"What Mr. Smith?" asked Mrs. Ronald, with sudden interest. "Not Mr. Smith of Hartly Manor?"

"I don't know what Manor he belongs to," slowly answered Sybil, already repenting what she had done.

"Death Manor, I am afraid," said Mrs. Kennedy, with a solemn shake of her head. "The Mr. Smith Sybil means died very miserably, I believe — I heard something of the kind in England."

"Surely not that poor vulgar man who went about Saint Vincent dropping his h's?" suggested Mrs. Ronald, speaking as if Mr. Smith's h's were things to be picked up.

Mr. Kennedy now spoke for the first time. Sybil, who sat facing him, had been struck with the expression which his face took, not merely when she mentioned Mr. Smith's name, but when his wife uttered the rather ominous words of "Death Manor." It was sudden and fierce, then a set smile followed, and he said,

"No, Mrs. Ronald, that Mr. Smith is alive and well. I had a letter from him this morning."

"I always pitied you, Mr. Kennedy, for having anything to do with that vulgar man," compassionately said Mrs. Ronald.

"He is vulgar," granted Mr. Kennedy; "but you see, Mrs. Ronald, business is no respecter of persons."

He spoke gaily, but his eye was on his wife all the time. Mrs. Kennedy smiled till her white teeth shone again.

"I never saw him," she said, "but Sybil described him in such lively terms, that I am sure I should know him again. A long, sallow, vulgar man, with heavy black eyes. I was disappointed to think he was dead, poor fellow — burned to death too, was not that dreadful? I have such a horror of fire," she added, with a shudder.

"Don't mention it," said Mrs. Ronald, with another shudder. "I saw poor Miss Dory burned to death. You remember my telling you, Miss Spencer?"

"Quite well," said Miss Spencer, calmly. She was not hard-hearted, but for the last nine years she had

heard Miss Dory burned to death over and over again, and so she had got rather used to it. Mrs. Ronald was convinced that she knew how to tell a story, and she thought it her duty to display this accomplishment as often as she could. She now felt it incumbent on herself to relate once more Miss Dory's lamentable end. So her hearers had it all — how Miss Dory's dress took fire, how she ran round the room with the flames as high as her head, and how, of the twenty people present, only one, namely, Mrs. Ronald, had the presence of mind to exclaim, "Don't let her out," which judicious admonition, not being heeded, led to Miss Dory's perdition.

"For with the fatal instinct of people on fire, she ran out into the garden, leaped into the pond, and was thence taken out — extinguished, indeed, but dying."

This gloomy narrative, which would have sickened Sybil at another time, was a relief to her on this day. She had felt, after speaking of Mr. Smith, like the pupil of the magician who called up a spirit he had not the power to dismiss again; but now Mr. Smith was forgotten, and Miss Dory's fate led to a dissertation on long skirts, this to another chapter on fashions, after which Mrs. Ronald and Miss Spencer rose and took their leave. Sybil, who never stayed longer than she could help in her stepmother's presence, rose too, and left the drawing-room. She went down-stairs, and crossed the cloister, and saw Mr. Dermot pacing one of the galleries with slow steps and downcast eyes. She could not resist the impulse of going up to him, and telling him what she had done. She felt sure that he would blame her, but she could not help it. Mr. Dermot heard her, and sighed.

"Poor little Sybil," he said, "many more such conversations will ruin me and serve Mrs. Kennedy. Why, child, that is what she wants — that, and nothing else."

"Ah! how can you forgive me? — how can you care for me?" she exclaimed, in her distress.

He took her hand, and raised it to his lips, half smiling at the fond fear and heedless confession.

"More than ever — more than ever, Sybil," he said, very kindly.

Sybil hung her head, ashamed of her folly. Did he read her thoughts, that he said in a very low voice, as if to make sure that none could hear him,

"Do not make life too dear to me, that is all; the war between her and me has begun, and God knows how it will end. God knows, Sybil, if I shall dare to wish for you a week hence."

There was a pathos in his voice — a longing and regret, which Sybil could not mistake. Oh! she was dear to him — very dear to him, if there was truth in man's looks or language.

"And I cannot help it — I can do nothing," she said, distressed at his dejected mien.

"No, nothing, Sybil — nothing but to be silent. I expect a letter, which will either condemn or reprieve me — for a while, at least. Till it comes, let us forget."

He spoke cheerfully, and his face remained serene, spite Sybil's wistful eyes.

"The morning is fine, and the cloister is pleasant," he pursued; "let us enjoy both whilst we may, Sybil — life is brief, and its sweetness rarely comes back. Let us take the good out of the present time, so have

said the wise of all ages. Let us, too, be wise in our generation."

It seemed to Sybil as if she could not say him nay. She forgot that she was to be fascinating and handsome — she only felt that she must yield, and do his pleasure. So they paced the cloister up and down, and thence passed into the garden, and spoke, not of love, nor of Mr. Dermot's troubles, nor of the future, but of the morning and its beauty, of life and its experiences, dark or fair; and throughout all, Mr. Dermot said, there ran, like a subtle burden, his unspoken love for Sybil. She said little; her heart was full. She could not forget that there hung a dark cloud over his life, and now that she partly guessed its meaning, it seemed far darker than before. A weight of sorrow was on her, and therewithal a sense of troubled happiness, stronger than that shadow of death. Often as he spoke she looked at him, and longed to say:

"Oh! since you love me at last, take me truly to your heart; tell me your cares, and let me share them. Let not mine be mere summer-love."

But humility as well as pride kept her silent. If this forbade her to solicit ungiven confidence, that said no less plainly she did not deserve it. She was too childish, too weak to be trusted by him. He could love her and be very kind to her, but she must always be as a tender little child in his sight.

"Be it so," thought Sybil, "be it so."

Something of that secret submission Mr. Dermot felt, not all, but enough; for as they returned to the house together, he stopped, to say very earnestly,

"Sybil, you are one of the most unselfish, self-

denying beings I ever knew. You ever forget yourself in others — it does me good to be near you."

Sybil blushed and trembled. There was something more than the admiration of beauty in his look. If she was a child, indeed, in his sight, she was so too in the reverence which we yield to childhood and innocence.

"Oh! if God will but be merciful to us, and let that trouble pass away, I shall be too happy," she thought in the fulness of her heart, as they entered the house together. And she did not see what Mr. Dermot saw, that Mrs. Kennedy was looking at them from her window, with a sullen smile on her face.

"Let her," he thought in secret scorn, "all is not over between us yet."

But do what he would, this was not the triumphant defiance of the morning.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BLANCHE did not look on alone. Her husband stood behind her all the time, watching her as she watched the pair below. She knew he was there, and turned round with the sullen smile still on her face.

"They do not look very happy," she said; "Mr. Dermot seems no very ardent lover."

"I wonder why he was kissing Sybil's hand in the cloister a while ago?" rejoined Mr. Kennedy.

A flash passed through Mrs. Kennedy's blue eyes.

"Oh! Sybil has a very pretty hand," she said,

"and I daresay Mr. Dermot admires it; but I wonder she let him — she used to be a shy little lady."

"I daresay she likes it," said Mr. Kennedy, smiling. "She chose to be offended with me because I took the liberty of marrying you, my love — and I suppose she is seeking for consolation."

He looked at his wife, with his hands in his pockets, but she did not heed the look. Mrs. Kennedy was a bold and unscrupulous woman, but penetration was not her gift. She could hunt out a secret; but in character she had less skill. She had mistaken both Sybil and Mr. Dermot in the past, and she now mistook her husband. Mr. Kennedy was essentially a secretive man. He could do a foolish thing, and marry too young a woman; he could squander his fortune to gratify her caprices; he could even so far succumb to her influence as to look on his child with changed eyes, but he could not give her his confidence. Because he had once revealed to her his intentions, she thought that she held the key to his heart, and reposed upon that thought with dangerous security.

"You still wish for the match?" she said, smiling in her turn.

"I never change my mind, my love."

"Well, Mr. Dermot is not a favourite of mine, nor am I a favourite of his," rejoined Mrs. Kennedy after a while; "but for all that he will do very well for Sybil, if she will have him."

Mr. Kennedy laughed and nodded.

"Not much fear of her saying him nay — a fine handsome fellow!"

Mrs. Kennedy could not be silent.

"Handsome! with red hair and green eyes!" she

said scornfully; "our ideas of beauty differ, Mr. Kennedy."

"Sybil admires his hair and his eyes," calmly replied Mr. Kennedy.

"Well, well, there is no accounting for tastes," remarked his wife, relapsing into sudden and suspicious good-humour; "only never expect me to be very gracious to him, that's all."

Gracious to him! Mr. Kennedy resolved she should never have the chance. The match which — to her — he seemed to desire was the very last thing he now wished for. For Mr. Kennedy was jealous. He did not know it, he did not say so to his own thoughts, but there are subtle recesses of the brain in which strange suspicions, doubts, and misgivings seethe and simmer, unsuspected and unknown, till some fearful explosion reveals their existence. In some such hidden region now brooded James Kennedy's jealousy, latent but very real, and not wholly groundless. In those days when he looked at Blanche Cains as a dispassionate observer, he had detected one or two looks passing between her and Mr. Dermot, which had excited a vague suspicion. Every subsequent event seeming to disprove this, he had forgotten it, and even now he would not acknowledge to himself that he remembered it, but he did. That recollection made him doubt the wisdom of giving his daughter to his friend, although that friend now seemed much inclined to take her. Suppose the old liking for his wife should revive? — such things have been — would it be very pleasant to have the man he dreaded within his domestic circle, even though it should be as his daughter's husband? Young wives had been forgotten ere this for beautiful

stepmothers; but wise men knew how to exclude such chances of peril from their home, and Mr. Kennedy, who thought himself wise, was ready to sacrifice Sybil and Mr. Dermot ten times over rather than run such risk. So he spoke plausibly to his wife, and heard her little half sweet, half acid comments on Mr. Dermot's sudden devotion to Sybil; and, drawing some bitter conclusions the while, he resolved to divide his rival for ever from his wife, and to begin this task by separating him from his daughter.

If he had told Blanche as much it might have been well for them both, but Mr. Kennedy could open his mind to none — least of all to one whom he suspected. Moreover, he could not forget the significant remarks she had made about Mr. Smith. Mistrust of her had entered his heart as she spoke, and was to leave it no more.

"Marry Sybil!" thought Mrs. Kennedy as her husband went downstairs, "never — let him if he dare!"

"I am afraid my love-story is turning to a drama, and will slip through my fingers," thought Mrs. Mush, the second day after the ball.

For the last ten years this lady having been excluded from active life by the death of her husband, who had worried her and given her enough to think of during his life-time, had become what she called a looker-on. She had considerable experience in the line, and knew to a tittle when matters went right or wrong. The first breath of discord was to her like a false note in music to a refined ear; and many such false notes she now detected. Sybil looked sad, and Mr. Dermot very grave, but they had not quarrelled,

Mrs. Mush could see that. Mrs. Kennedy seemed the very picture of happiness, but she never lost sight of her step-daughter, Mrs. Mush saw that too; but best of all, she saw that Mr. Kennedy watched his wife incessantly.

"There will come the hitch," she thought; "poor things, they do not see it."

They saw nothing indeed, for generous natures are often blind to their own cost. Something Mr. Dermot perceived, but not much, and Sybil thought but of him and forgot all else. These two were not often together, but no one who saw them in the same room could mistake their feelings; and Blanche Cains had to look on and feel powerless. Her husband had been too much for her she felt, though she did not know how far this was true. She did all she could to avert the event she dreaded. She was tender, she was fond, she laughed at Mr. Dermot's red hair and green eyes, and Mr. Kennedy took her fondness as his due, and let her believe whatever she pleased. He had a mind tenacious of mistrust, and his once awakened was to sleep no more. Mrs. Kennedy was not jealous, for she had never loved; but that Sybil and her old lover should wed and scorn her, as they must both for her folly and her perfidy, she could not endure. That they should wed and live in Saint Vincent, and thereby banish her from that narrow world where she was already Queen Regnant, was something worse even than their love and their scorn; for Mrs. Kennedy was a matter-of-fact woman even in her hatred.

And yet to that double end they seemed to be tending. It was impossible not to perceive that Mr. Dermot was much enamoured. He knew himself be-

loved, and that certainty had lured him on further than doubt or desire. He never remembered Sybil's pale face and cold hand without a secret thrill of happiness. Surely he had at last found rest, and that fond young heart, so ready to receive him, was a sweet and calm refuge from the stormy cares of life. There had ever been doubt and secret discontent in his love for Blanche Cains, but this was all security and repose. Ah! if Fate would but be kind, what happy days he could yet snatch and enjoy in that old abbey with Sybil Kennedy!

Sybil was a book no less easy to read. She had the happy gift of the young to forget sorrow quickly, and look at the sunny side of life. Mr. Dermot spoke no more of his trouble, and Sybil began to think that it must have gone by, and that happiness and joy were in store for her after all. The light returned to her eyes, the bloom to her cheek, and the ready smile to her lips. He never spoke of love, for they never met a second alone; but she could read his face, and its meaning sunk in her heart, and abided there a joyful guest. Seven days had thus gone by, when he met her one morning on the staircase. He stopped her at once, and pointing to an open letter in his hand, he said with a mocking, triumphant smile,

"The first act of the play, or the first canto of the epic, is over, Sybil, and Duessa is at bay. I dare not say that the false witch is conquered; but we can bid her defiance for awhile."

He took her hand again, and again it trembled within his; but Mrs. Kennedy's door opened above. Mr. Dermot dropped Sybil's hand with an impatient frown, and merely said,

"I am going out for the day. Do you want anything from Saint Vincent?"

"A world of things," gaily replied Sybil. "Books, seeds, birds — shall I make out a list?"

"Pray do."

She took out her pocket-book, and leaning on the banister of the staircase, she wrote a list of imaginary requirements, which she handed him gravely. He knew that Mrs. Kennedy was watching them from above, for he even heard the rustle of her dress; but he did not care. His heart swam in happiness and love. It was going back to youth to look at Sybil's radiant face, and read to the meaning of her soft dark eyes.

"I shall be home early," he said, taking the list from her hand; and Sybil guessed which way he would come, and that he hoped to find her on his path. But though she longed to go and meet him, she resolved that she would not. No, she must not, it would not be right, and if he had anything to say he must find or make his opportunity.

"A pleasant journey to you, Mr. Dermot," she said, saucily; "and pray do not forget my list. I shall die of grief if you leave out one of the items."

She nodded and went on, and he looked after her, whilst Mrs. Kennedy stood and looked above.

CHAPTER XIX.

"At last! at last!" was the joyful cry which rang through Sybil's heart that day. Happy Sybil! How many are there to whom that "at last" never comes! Who pine for it from youth upwards, and look back towards it in age with fond regret! But you were not of these. Your "at last" was true, and made you restless with happiness the whole of that long day.

As the hour of his return drew nigh, Sybil longed to go and meet him, but dared not. She knew he would come through the garden, and as there was no fear in her love, it would have been very pleasant to go and greet him, but she dared not. It would not be maidenly, it would not be right.

"I must stay within," thought Sybil, with a reluctant sigh. "Ah! why can one not act as one feels? And where would be the harm?"

Sybil was standing on the threshold of the house as she thought thus. She was standing like a young bird by the open door of its cage, wondering whether or not to take its flight in the world without. A hand laid on her shoulder made her turn round with a little start. She looked and saw her father. Did Mr. Kennedy know why his daughter was thus looking at the garden with shy, wistful eyes? Whether he knew it or not, it did not change his purpose.

"Sybil, your aunt Glyn has asked me to let you spend some time with her, and I have promised to do so."

A look of troubled surprise passed through Sybil's eyes, then she said,

"When am I to go?"

"This afternoon — now. Go in and get ready."

She could scarcely believe in so hard a sentence.

"Oh! papa, are you tired of me?" she exclaimed, sadly.

"Tired of you, Pussy! No. Why, I shall go over every day to see you. Make haste to get ready."

She could not resist. She must obey. So she went in and sorrowfully prepared for a visit of some duration. She lingered in the hope of gaining time, but it did not avail her. Mr. Kennedy came himself to her door to hurry her, and Sybil was compelled to confess herself ready.

As they left the house Sybil started. It seemed to her that she had heard Mr. Dermot's voice in the cloister. She looked at Mr. Kennedy. His face remained unmoved.

"Was not that Mr. Dermot?" she asked. "He was to bring me home ever so many things from Saint Vincent."

"No," he replied, calmly, "it is the foreman."

Sybil did not dare to contradict him; but as she entered the carriage, she saw Mr. Dermot standing at the gate and looking after her with grave, reproachful eyes.

"Surely that was Mr. Dermot," she could not help saying.

But Mr. Kennedy was both deaf and blind. He saw, he heard nothing, and drove off in that condition.

"That is her doing," thought Sybil, with an aching heart; "and he will think I am going away on purpose to shun him."

She looked behind her, hoping to catch another glimpse of him, but Mr. Dermot had vanished. She looked at her father, and gave him an appealing glance, but Mr. Kennedy only saw the landscape.

"It is her doing!" thought Sybil again.

Her doing it was, in so far that she had ventured to suggest this visit to Miss Glyn. But however strong might be her wish to divide her former friend from her former lover, it was not so strong as Mr. Kennedy's; and Sybil felt it with a sad and vague intuition, for which she could have given no reason.

The journey was brief, and within not a quarter of an hour Sybil had been handed over to Miss Glyn, and left in that lady's care by Mr. Kennedy.

"I shall come now and then and see you, Pussy," said her father, kissing her as they parted. But Sybil knew he would not come. She was exiled and punished for his sin and that of Blanche Cains'.

At any time Sybil would have felt it a hardship to be left alone with Miss Glyn. She liked her aunt, but not her aunt's exclusive society. Now to this hardship, which included so much sorrow, was added a peculiar infliction. Miss Glyn considered it a great blessing for Sybil to be out of Saint Vincent and with her, and she said so.

"It could do you no good, child, to be in that house," she said, calmly. "Your father never minded you much, however he might pet and spoil you; Mrs. Mush is, in my opinion, incapable of the task, and I need say nothing of Mrs. Kennedy."

The upshot of these remarks was that Miss Glyn was the only person who could mind Sybil. "Being minded" is one of the wrongs of youth, for youth is

convinced that it can mind and take care of itself. Moreover, Sybil did not hold Miss Glyn's judgment as a diamond of the first water. She had sense enough to see that Miss Glyn had done a very foolish thing in setting up in business, and why should she trust her guidance to one who could not manage her own concerns! Luckily, however, for the domestic peace of these two ladies, Miss Glyn's "minding" was more in words than in deeds. Sybil did pretty much as she pleased in her new home, and that it was to be her home she soon received proof, for before the first week of her sojourn was out, her father sent her down her piano. Miss Glyn, who was very fond of her niece, saw the arrival of this instrument with considerable satisfaction, and surveyed its entrance into her counting-house parlour with considerable interest. Not so Sybil, she could have cried with mingled grief and vexation, and scarcely restrained her tears.

Ah! when should she see him now? Miss Glyn would keep her, and her father would leave her, and Mr. Dermot would not come to her aunt's house. It was her step-mother's doing. Yes, she felt it with secret though deep bitterness, that her false friend was false to the last.

"She knows I like him," thought Sybil; "for was there a thought, a motion of my heart, I concealed from her; and so she robs me of my only chance, and yet what is it to her now? She gave him up long ago, and she married my father. She cannot be his wife, and love Mr. Dermot. Then why make me miserable? She ought to see that he is not so very fond of me, after all; that he was only beginning to like me a little, a very little, just because he wants

to marry, I suppose, and that I was the only girl at hand!"

These were bitter thoughts, and they added to the weariness of this dreary day. Towards evening it began to rain, and Miss Glyn prosed dreadfully. Sybil, unable to bear more, went up to her room. She stood by her window, and, leaning her forehead on the panes, she looked out on the dreary prospect. In a happier mood Sybil would have found beauty in this wild landscape, but now she only felt that it was savage and melancholy in the extreme. The rain had ceased, but heavy clouds chased each other across a stormy sky. Stunted trees of a deep and gloomy green bent before the strong wind, and broke on the dull line of a low horizon. A lurid gleam of sun shot athwart the sullen-looking river, and a broken foreground of white chalky rock and soil. Away swept the eddying waters beyond Sybil's view, through a barren and desert-looking plain. Not a human figure, shepherd or sportsman, not a cottage or thatched hut, with its thin wreath of smoke, broke on the desolation of this wide moor. Far away she saw a few white specks, and she knew what they were — the druidical remains of the old heathen worship, the mysterious signs and tokens of the dead Celtic faith, and the knowledge that they were there, only made solitude more impressive. Sybil thought of the Abbey and its old garden, and the library in the old happy days of Uncle Edward, and her heart yearned towards her old home and its lost joys. What had she done that she should be banished? — and how long must her exile last? — for exile it was, though Miss Glyn knew it not. If that lady had known, indeed, how convenient

a tool she was in Mrs. Kennedy's hands, we may well doubt how far she would have been anxious to secure the company of her niece.

"And now I must go down to tea," thought Sybil drearily, "and hear long stories of commercial interest. Oh, dear! — oh, dear! how dreadful it will be!"

As Sybil was wondering if her head did not ache, and she could not stay in her room, the sound of a voice below made her heart give a great throb in her bosom. Surely it was impossible. It was not Mr. Dermot talking to her aunt. And yet who had a voice like his, both sweet and strong? Trembling from head to foot with doubt and excitement, Sybil went downstairs, calling up as composed a cast of countenance as she could command on such short notice.

Yes, it was Mr. Dermot. He sat talking to Miss Glyn, and talking, if not with friendliness, at least with perfect equanimity on both sides. He bowed and smiled to Sybil, but without interrupting his discourse.

"You see, Miss Glyn," he said, "their plan is this — to secure as many samples as they can, and then stop payment."

"But how villainous!" cried Miss Glyn, whose phraseology when excited was strong.

"It is not honest, to be sure."

"But what am I to do about my butter?" indignantly asked Miss Glyn; "I cannot sacrifice I know not how many casks, can I?"

"It is an awkward case," gravely said Mr. Dermot, slowly stroking his chin as he spoke. "Will you let me see the papers?"

"To be sure, to be sure," eagerly replied Miss Glyn; "they are upstairs. Sybil, do go for them — but, no, you would not know where to find them. I shall go myself."

She rose and left them. Sybil felt blushing with guilty joy and confusion. It was not merely his presence that gladdened her very heart — it was the certain knowledge that Mr. Dermot, her friend, would never have come unbidden to her aunt's house — no, it was Mr. Dermot, her lover, who had come, and come to see her! Her chair was near the window, and Sybil could look out without affectation. The moon had risen, and now lit the landscape, which half an hour before had seemed so dreary. Oh! how it was altered! Was it that pale silvery light which shone in patches across the dark plain, and shivered in the flowing river, was it that which gave the scene such enchantment in Sybil's eyes? Fairy legends were never half so fair and sweet as the vision with which her fancy peopled the scene. Undine, Titania, Oberon, were cold and dull to the joyous dreams of the ardent girl.

"Well, Sybil," said Mr. Dermot, after watching her for a while, "have you got nothing to say to me?"

He went to her, and held out his hand. Sybil gave him hers, and, turning round, beheld another scene — the cool moonlight stole upon the floor, but the bright lamp lit the whole room, and its light fell on Mr. Dermot's genial and smiling face, and Sybil felt warmth and brightness around her.

"I am very glad to see you," she half stammered. "I did not expect it."

"We may thank Mrs. Kennedy for this move,"

said Mr. Dermot, drawing his chair near hers. "Well, Sybil, she gave me a week's work, and hard work too. I had to get deep into Miss Glyn's business, and luckily for me that business is rather in a sad condition. But I stormed the fairy castle after all, and circumvented Mrs. Kennedy, did I not, Sybil?"

His keen grey eyes sparkled with such mischievous light, and such triumphant meaning, that Sybil felt half frightened. She began to feel very shy of her quondam friend, and as she felt she looked. That maiden coyness is flattering to most men. It is an acknowledgment of supremacy, which delights self-love; and it is a mute appeal for mercy, which a generous heart never denies. Mr. Dermot's eyes rested with delight on Sybil's blushing face and half down-cast eyes, for he could read their language; but he forbore making any further allusion to the motive which had brought him.

"The Abbey is very dull without you," he said; "I now find that you must have made a great deal of noise — the place is so silent. Even Narcisse has noticed it, and complains of the quietness. Mademoiselle, he says, was like a butterfly, everywhere, and then she sang so merrily — and now it is all so tranquil."

"Then I am better out of the house," demurely said Sybil; "besides," she added, with a flash in her dark eye, "Mrs. Kennedy has a fine voice and will sing — she likes duets."

Mr. Dermot blushed.

"You remember that time," he said, deprecatingly; "and so do I. How often as we sang I watched a little admiring figure sitting apart, and so generously

proud of her friend that it did one's heart good to see her beaming happy face. Well, what ails you?" he added, seeing with concern that tears stood in Sybil's eyes.

"I cannot help it," she said vehemently; "oh! how I loved her! how I believed in her! — what a great, what a noble creature she was to me — and now it is gone — all gone — and the thought of that time is sickening and loathsome. She was, as you say, a Duessa — false and fair."

"And who was Una, Sybil? Who was the Redcross Knight that forsook Innocence and Truth, and was led away by Falsehood?"

"I am sure I don't know," demurely replied Sybil; "to be candid, you do not look like him a bit."

"Don't I, Sybil? Well, who said I did? I do not speak of the look of things, but of their reality. Tales of knight-errantry, and magic, and enchantment, and romance come true every day, whatever you may think. Our ancestors wore mail and helmet, and we wear hats and coats; but we have the same passions which they had, and wage the same wars with them. Human nature is changeless through all the accidents of Time; and to come back to my argument, Duessa and Una, and the Redcross Knight too, are just as true as Blanche Cains, and Sybil Kennedy, and Edward Dermot."

Mr. Dermot spoke thus very plainly, without hesitation or pause; and Sybil, who heard his voice, did not dare to look at his face. She wondered if he meant all he said, or at least if he meant it as she understood it. Was she indeed heavenly Una for him, the slighted mistress of a brave, though deceived heart? Was it in truth and reality that he

sought her now, or was she not to set too high and deep a value on this figure of speech? He seemed to read her thoughts, though her face was bent and her eyes were fastened on her hands clasped on her lap.

"I mean every word I say, Sybil," he said, impressively.

Her heart was stirred, and, spite of herself, she could not help answering him:

"I believe you — I believe you."

"There they are," said Miss Glyn, coming in with her arms heaped with papers; "but I think we had better have tea first."

Mr. Dermot thought so too. Miss Glyn bade Sybil make the tea, and he helped to sort and prepare the papers; but he watched her all the time. He liked her easy and graceful motions, he liked too her happy young face. It had got thin indeed; but the rosy flush that was on it now gave promise of returning health and beauty. He felt sure of her, and that security was very sweet. Calm, pure, and free from all fever, was this new love to both. After tea Sybil was left to herself, for Mr. Dermot's errand was not a fictitious one, and he was deep with Miss Glyn in calculations and figures. But Sybil did not feel dull — not for a second. She sat by the window and saw the two pictures — the moonlit country — a very Eden now; the bright warm room cheerfulness itself, spite its ledgers.

"Oh! I could be for ever happy so," thought Sybil; "for ever."

And so you could, Sybil, if the first glow and exquisite fervour of such feelings were a thing of "for ever."

CHAPTER XX.

THERE was a little summer-house in Miss Glyn's garden, and there Sybil sat the next morning with her work upon her lap.

The spot was pleasant, the hour was delightful. In the green boughs of a tall tree near her a blackbird perched and began to sing. As she heard him, Sybil remembered the old Irish legend of the pious maiden who went out to pray in her father's orchard on a summer morning. She too heard the blackbird singing. Three times he sang so sweetly that mortal had never heard anything like it, and with every song a hundred years flew by, and when he ceased, and the maiden went back to her father's house, she found a village, and strange people, and a new world, that recognized her not. She told her story, and old men remembered an ancient tradition of their youth which confirmed it. And yet how could it be? She was blooming, and fair, and young, as if Time had not touched her!

"But you see," continued Sybil, who was telling the story to some imaginary listener, "it was true, for all that; for when they gave her food, and it passed her lips, all her beauty, all her youth perished in one moment, and withering into sudden age, she sank and died. She had been in Paradise all the time, and could not live upon earth. Blackbird, blackbird, don't you take me away to Paradise!" thought Sybil, looking up saucily at the little black songster on the bough. "I don't want to leave earth just yet. I am young, you see, and pretty, they say, and loved perhaps, and

it would never do to come back with three hundred years on my head, and find graves in forgotten churchyards — would it, now?"

A brilliant trill was blackbird's reply. Alas! he was no heavenly bird, we fear, and his conversation was on earth with his lady-love just then, such a conversation as Mr. Dermot, who now suddenly entered Sybil's bower, was much inclined for. His face told her his errand. Miss Glyn had said that she would drive off to Saint Vincent early, and Mr. Dermot had availed himself of the knowledge.

"My aunt is out," said Sybil.

"I know it, Sybil; but I want you, not Miss Glyn."

He sat down by her side. His voice was sad, his look was grave. Sybil's heart sank. What new trouble was this?

"Sybil, I spoke to your father this morning. My prophecy is fulfilling fast. That woman will make us enemies, without even taking the trouble to do so. Your father knows and suspects the past, and he half hates half fears me. It was to divide us that he brought you here. God help him if he thought that I could look on his wife with a treacherous eye! Sybil, I love you, and you know it, and you believe in me; but though I told him so, he doubted. He did all he could, Sybil, to withhold his consent, and if he gave it at last, it was because he did not dare to say me nay. Ungenerous and reluctant though it be, I have it, however, and now I require but yours. Before you speak, Sybil, let me tell you that matters are pretty nearly with me as they were on the morning after the ball. I have a keen enemy, not a strong one, I hope, but the

girl I marry must be prepared for possible trouble and grief. Sybil, I am selfish enough to ask you to be that girl; but, oh! think of it well," he added, sadly, "do not say yes if you fear repentance or regret."

Sybil looked up at him with sad, reproachful eyes.

"Mr. Dermot," she said, "be honest. You know I like you, and you come to me in kindness and in affection — but, oh! not in love. And yet I told you once what I would have, and I will have no less."

"Not in love!" said Mr. Dermot, his face flushing with pain; "in what then, Sybil? For what other woman would I so far humble my pride that I would come to her with the confession I have just uttered. Sybil, it is man's right and privilege to bring happiness and security where he loves. It is his right and duty to guard his wife from all sorrow, and make her life as happy as a summer's day. And I cannot do this. I am cut off by a hard fate from one of the most generous privileges of manhood. I believe I can promise that poverty shall never come near you — beyond this I cannot go. Money and myself are all I have to give to the woman who will have me. Do not think," he added, looking at her keenly, "I am not aware that in acting as I act I am selfish; but I neither can nor will help it. I see sorrow in store for me, but if I can snatch a few of life's blessings I will. I will have love, and beauty, and youth, and sweet companionship, Sybil, and trust to God for a calm future. Sybil, Sybil, when we are married, and you know all, you will say that passion was strong on Edward Dermot the day he asked you to marry him; and who knows, Sybil, you will wish, perhaps, that he had loved you less."

Sybil turned pale as death.

"You wrong me," she said, "you wrong me. I can never wish that. Let what trouble, what calamity come over you that it may please God to send, I can never wish that."

"Then you will marry me, Sybil?" he said smiling.

"Give me time to be sure of you," she replied sadly.

"Let us get married at once, Sybil, and you will be sure enough of me then."

But this prompt way of securing him, though it would have been highly to Mr. Dermot's liking, would not suit Sybil.

"You little sceptic," he said with a touch of impatience, "can I take a yard and measure love to convince you?"

"It is all so new to you," she pleaded.

"Who knows, Sybil," he replied, reddening slightly. "I never could bear that Count de Renneville. I cannot bear even now to remember that you once liked him — not much, it is true, but too much by far."

He spoke with a resentful jealousy, that went to Sybil's heart. She looked up at him and smiled.

"Yes, I liked him," she said calmly, "but I never loved him, or I could not have forgotten him in a few days. I liked him, but as we like men and women in dreams — it is all over when we waken in the morning. Was it so, Mr. Dermot, that you liked Blanche Cains?"

"No," he replied honestly, "for that is not love; and I loved her, Sybil — I loved her as much as I loathe her now. But let us forget them both, Sybil, and think of our own concerns — life is short, and time is passing away. Listen to that bird above us;

he is singing to his mistress, nay, to his wife. The storm may come and shatter his nest to-morrow, he is happy to-day. To me, too, the storm may come, Sybil; do not grudge me a few happy hours ere it breaks."

There was a passionate longing in his voice that went to Sybil's heart and convinced her. But, indeed, did she need convincing? She said not a word, but she gave him her hand. Once more that little childish hand lay within his, but it was warm and happy now.

"I know there is a doubt in you still," he said reproachfully; "but I cannot deal in professions, Sybil, so you must take me upon trust."

"I will — I will," replied Sybil gaily; and when I think you like me enough, I shall tell you so. I will come to you, Mr. Dermot, and say, 'You like me enough now — quite enough.'"

"Give me your word upon it, Sybil."

She gave him her word, and Sybil would keep that promise, he knew. She would come to him fond, frank, and happy. She would say to him, "you like me quite enough, Mr. Dermot;" and perhaps he would give her cause to say, "you like me too much," for, alas! Mr. Dermot just then felt in the mood of every fond folly.

"What are you thinking of?" uneasily asked Sybil.

"Of revenge," severely replied Mr. Dermot.

For a vindictive man Mr. Dermot also looked a very happy one; but he was not so happy as Sybil, for he only got what he had never lost, and she had won what she had never hoped to possess. They had

both risen, and stood arm-in-arm on the grass beneath the tree. Suddenly Sybil uttered a little cry. One of the young birds had fallen from the nest above down to her feet. Mr. Dermot picked it up, and placed it in her hand. Sybil gave it a tender look, whilst the mother flew around them with a piteous cry.

"Ah! put it back," said Sybil to Mr. Dermot, "put it back. I should like to keep it, but I must not rob the poor mother; but can you reach the nest, Mr. Dermot?"

He smiled, and, taking the bird from her hand, he was up the tree and down again in a few moments. Sybil gave a little sigh of regret as he came back empty-handed, and looking into her face, he read its meaning.

"Shall I get it back?" he asked.

"Oh! no," she replied, arresting him by her hand laid on his arm. "Oh! no, do not. Let the mother keep her young one."

There was something in Sybil's tone that jarred on Mr. Dermot. He stood still and looked at her with a face suddenly overcast.

"Sybil," he said rather moodily, "it is not too late, you are free still if you repent."

"Free!" said Sybil vaguely, "free!"

"Yes, Sybil, free — for truly mine is no lot to share."

He said it and he meant it.

"I can see she is a true woman," he thought. "She will love her husband, but she will love her child ten times more; and the day on which a child is born to me will be a day of sorrow and humiliation."

He had told her she was free! Oh! cruel words

— cruel and pitiless! Mr. Dermot repented them the moment they were spoken, but he could not call them back. Sybil gave him a look full of reproach and woe.

“Why do you tell me this?” she said pitifully; “you know I cannot help myself — that whatever lot lies before us, there is none so hard as being free, as you call it. I was so happy a while back.”

“And so was I, Sybil,” he said sadly, “the happiest man alive; and now the darkness has all come back, for a thought haunts me, Sybil. I cannot make you happy. Ask yourself how you would feel if you thought that all wretchedness was to come to me through you.”

“It would pierce my heart,” replied Sybil, her tears flowing at the thought; “but that is not your case, Mr. Dermot. Believe me, whatever fate it is that you ask me to share, I can say, like Ruth, ‘Whithersoever thou shalt go I will go; and where thou shalt dwell, I will also dwell. Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God,’ and I will never repent it,” she added, bending her flushed face.

“Oh! Sybil, Sybil,” he said, half sorrowfully, “do not love me so much; for surely such love as yours is like the manifold blessings showered by the gods on Polycrates, the forerunner of all loss.”

“But you cannot lose it,” said Sybil, smiling divinely; “it is yours for ever, you know.”

“Yes; but you may die, Sybil,” he said, with sorrowful passion; “you may die, and tell me then what I should do without you? It is sickening to think of.”

"Oh! you will love again," said Sybil, in a sad, low voice.

"Never!" he exclaimed, standing still, and speaking with much energy. "I could not — I would not, Sybil. This is my last and most precious venture on that sea. I might marry, but love again, never, never!"

There was a sorrowful cadence in his voice, that was more than convincing. It was certainty to hear him. Sybil looked up, and he bent down. He kissed her, and as his trembling lips touched her cheek, Sybil felt, "I am his for ever — for ever!"

CHAPTER XXI.

WHEN Miss Glyn came back, Mr. Dermot was gone, and Sybil did not tell her that he had come. She could not bear that any should share her great joy, or even suspect it. For now it was indeed a true "at last." Even in the bitterness with which he had spoken, she had read love. "And when I see him again," thought Sybil, "I shall tell him he loves me quite enough." Poor Miss Glyn! she noticed Sybil's happy looks, and congratulated her on the change.

"You see, my dear," she said "you could never have got on well in Saint Vincent, never. I am glad you came here."

"And so am I," saucily said Sybil.

"I met Mr. Dermot," continued Miss Glyn; "he was disappointed not to have found me within, but he will call again this evening. I must say Mr. Dermot

improves upon acquaintance, and that I am much obliged to him for the trouble he is taking."

Sybil was all openness and truth. If this had been her own secret, and not his as well as hers, she would have told it to her aunt that moment, but she did not dare to do so, so Miss Glyn went on:

"Poor Mr. Dermot! I have a strong impression that Miss Cains — I will never call her otherwise — made a fool of him. Well, well, he had a narrow escape!"

Sybil turned her face away.

"I shall never be able to hide it," she thought, "if aunt goes on so."

Luckily Miss Glyn had concerns of her own to think of, and Mr. Dermot was soon forgotten.

He came that evening. Another happy evening snatched from time, if Sybil had but known it. Mr. Dermot improved even more upon Miss Glyn's acquaintance this time than the last.

"He is very pleasant," she said to Sybil, when he was gone. "I think it a great pity he made himself so awfully disagreeable formerly."

Sybil longed to say:

"Why, aunt, you were disagreeable, not he."

But apart from the fact that such a remark would have been very disrespectful, Miss Glyn's perfect sincerity kept her mute. It was in all good faith that Sybil's aunt daily fell into inconsistencies, and all the time she was so certain that others were to blame, and that she was sinless.

"I wonder when he will tell aunt, or when I shall go back to Saint Vincent," thought Sybil, when she was up in her room. "I cannot bear to deceive or

cheat her — it is like Blanche Cains, and I will tell him so."

In the meantime she fell asleep, and dreamed of Duessa, and Una, and the Redcross Knight, and of dragons, and enchantments, strange and dreary.

But the world was gay, and a bright sun shone, when Sybil rose the next morning. She saw the river glistening in its light, and the wide moor was white and gold with flowers that danced in the sun. She threw a handkerchief over her head and ran out. That wild solitude attracted her. The wind that swept over its green wastes had music in it; the flowers were sweeter than the roses of Saint Vincent.

"I am glad I was brought here," thought Sybil; "oh! how true it is that everything is for the best — I would not have stayed there for anything now. I wonder if that cromlech is far away."

The white stones shone in the sun and looked near; but Sybil found that they looked nearer than they were. She would not be conquered, however, and never stopped till she stood at the foot of the Druidical pile. How large it looked, now that she stood close to it. How small those huge rude old stones made Sybil feel as she sat at their base, and rested in their shadow, thinking of the far times when men first reared them in that wilderness. Not far from where she sat, wound the road, a narrow and stony path, but the only one which crossed the waste. Ere long the echoing gallop of a horse made Sybil start up with something like fear. The country was safe indeed, but she did not like being alone here, so far from home at that hour, and wondered whether she ought to turn back. Wiser than this course it seemed

to her was to hide behind the stones, and see who came along this lonely path, so she slipped round the pillars of the cromlechs, and, concealed by the hindermost one, she waited till the horseman should have gone by. But the handkerchief which Sybil had put on her head to shade it from the sun had unluckily remained behind. The wind caught it and blew it across the road, where the stranger at once saw it. It was a gay little handkerchief, embroidered and festooned, and no doubt seemed a prize, for Mr. Dermot alighted, picked it up, and at once went up to the cromlechs, walked round, and found Sybil.

"I did not know it was you," she said, rather vexed to be found hiding.

"Why, Sybil, what brings you here? You are a mile away, at least."

"Well, and how many miles are you?"

"Oh! but I am out on business."

"And I on pleasure."

"And I am not bareheaded, Sybil."

"Nor shall I be if you will return me that handkerchief."

She held out her hand, but he did not give it to her. He looked at it admiringly, and said,

"You worked that, Sybil — you have clever little fingers."

"I don't know about that, Mr. Dermot; but I do know that the sun is very hot!"

The handkerchief was returned at once.

"You are going to my aunt's, I suppose?" said Sybil.

"No, I am going to Saint Vincent."

"But this is the long road."

"I dislike the short one. Shall I take you home on horseback, Sybil?"

"No, thank you. I do not trust that new horse of yours, he has a wicked green eye."

"Not trust Ebony? See how quietly he stands. That horse is a lamb!"

Sybil shook her head sceptically. Mr. Dermot, nothing loath to linger near her, called Ebony, who came to him neighing fondly.

"Now, is he not a noble creature?" said Mr. Dermot, looking at him with admiration. "Did you ever see so black a coat, Sybil, or one so glossy? And then he is so finely proportioned. I found him rough, shaggy, uncared for, in a farm-yard, where no one could appreciate his worth; and look at him now!"

Sybil looked, and shrank back. Ebony was very handsome, but he had a strange look.

"I would not trust him," she said.

"Not trust him!" he replied. "Why, have I not saved him from misery, and indulged and petted him to his heart's content? Not trust Ebony! Look at him, Sybil."

He approached the horse, who stood very still.

"Take care!" cried Sybil, but she spoke too late. Mr. Dermot lay bleeding and prostrate at her feet, and Ebony was off, galloping across the moor, neighing and snorting, and tossing his black mane in defiance.

At first Sybil could neither move nor speak, so sudden, so rapid had it all been. She knelt and bent over him; he was senseless, and for a moment Sybil thought he was dead. But no, she felt his heart, and faint though its beatings were, she detected them. But, alas! what should she do? There was no chance

of a passer-by. No one had seen her come out, and no one, therefore, would seek her here. Should she, then, leave him alone, perhaps to die? And yet there was no help for it — hard though it was, she must. She rose and took a few steps away from him, but twice she came back, weeping and wringing her hands in anguish. Oh! that he would waken out of that death-like sleep — that those fixed eyes, which gazed and saw her not, would give her hope and consolation. "I must go," she thought, and a third time she went, and went without looking back.

It was not long ere Sybil returned, accompanied. Mr. Dermot was still in a swoon, and was conveyed unconscious to Miss Glyn's house. That lady had come out for him herself, and was profoundly silent the whole way home. To Sybil's breathless inquiries and scared looks she returned no other reply than "How should I know?" or a shake of the head, which made Sybil's heart feel like lead. Indeed, Miss Glyn thought Mr. Dermot all but a dead man, and when, several hours later, a doctor came from Saint Vincent, he did not say much to remove this sentence from Mr. Dermot's head.

"Even if he recovers," he said, cautiously, "I doubt if ever the poor gentleman will be again what he has been."

Sybil heard him, and felt as if the words turned her into stone. She looked at the couch on which Edward Dermot had been laid; she saw his pale face, pale as death, his hair dabbled with blood, his inanimate limbs, and she remembered him handsome, strong, and full of life, as he had stood before her that morning. And even if he lived, never again

should he be such — never! Life was robbed of its blessings for him, and health and strength were as things that had been. She could not bear to look at him, and to think that such was his fate. She left the room, and walked out.

She went she knew not whither at first, but she soon discovered what feeling had led her when she found herself in the moor, walking fast towards the cromlech. She stopped short, and looked around her with a bursting heart. The low plain lay wide as a sea in the red light of the sunset. A haze of gold spread from earth to heaven. The wearied sun was sinking down to rest, and like a journeyer whose goal is reached, he cast one long last look on the broad moor. The rapid river, that darkened as it flowed, went through the waste to meet night hidden far away in low misty horizons. It was a glorious sunset, and glittering afar, Sybil could see the fatal cromlech. "I will go — I will go," she thought, and on she went till she reached it.

Oh! how cruel is the passive indifference of all inanimate objects to man's sorrow! There they stood, the grim old stones, that had beheld ages go by, and what was Sybil's grief to them? She flung herself on the grass that had drunk his blood that morning, and which sweet evening dews were already bathing; and what did grass, or flowers, or earth, or sky care for her passionate tears, and her poor young heart's anguish? What did they care for that full tide of life which was ebbing away in her aunt's parlour, or for the happy strength that would never return?

"Oh! I cannot stay here," suddenly thought Sybil rising. "What if he should die whilst I am away?"

She went home at full speed, and reached the house breathless. Miss Glyn was the first person she met. Sybil looked at her eagerly; but Miss Glyn's face was mute, and said nothing.

"How is Mr. Dermot?" asked Sybil at length.

"In the same state — come in here, Sybil."

She took her into a small storeroom, and shut the door carefully. They were both in the darkness, yet Sybil felt herself turning crimson.

"Sybil," said Miss Glyn, "may I ask what is the nature of your feelings for Mr. Dermot?"

Sybil was silent. She would neither tell the truth nor disguise it.

"Perhaps you can tell me what Mr. Dermot feels for you?"

"He loves me," replied Sybil proudly.

"Well, but have you reason to believe that he wishes to marry you?"

"Yes, aunt, I have." But even as she said it Sybil thought, with a pang, of his pale, senseless face, and burst into tears.

"Well," said Miss Glyn after a pause, "he is in so deplorable a condition, poor fellow! that I must be lenient, but I must say I think it was too bad to come here after you without first speaking to me; and, Sybil, take my advice — keep your feelings under control. You know that Mr. Dermot's recovery is, unfortunately, very doubtful."

"Oh! aunt — aunt, do not say so!" piteously cried Sybil — "do not! It was but yesterday morning that he asked me to become his wife, and that I felt so happy — do not say so!"

Miss Glyn said nothing. She was too kind-hearted

to scold, and she was too much provoked to conceal it if she did speak. So she took the wisest course, and was mute.

And now life and death held one of their great battles over a sick bed. Miss Glyn's commercial establishment was turned into a hospital. Doctors, surgeons came, some from hundreds of miles, to see Mr. Dermot. Remorse for the weakness of his friendship seemed to have entered Mr. Kennedy's heart. He was incessant in his watching and his cares. He took one long journey on purpose to consult a celebrated medical man who had refused to come, and, by dint of prayers and entreaties, he brought him, and dismissed him with a princely fee. Mrs. Kennedy's flowing skirts rustled near the sick-bed, where Mr. Dermot lay all but dying, and she once left the room with her face buried in a cambric pocket-handkerchief. To her new circle, Mrs. Ronald and the rest, she spoke of this fatal accident as having nearly sent Mr. Kennedy out of his senses, and having thrown her into a fainting fit of twenty minutes' duration. Did she act her part well, or was it all a part? Did she feel it needful to hide a mortal hate under the guise of sorrow? or did old love waken anew in her heart, not in its early ardour, indeed, but at least in its tender pity? Alas! human nature is so complex, that both hypotheses might be true. She might grieve for Mr. Dermot when he was dying, and she might hate him when he was recovering.

Whatever her feelings were, her word was taken for Gospel truth. Mrs. Ronald's admiration for Mrs. Kennedy went on increasing, and her disapprobation of Sybil increased in the same ratio. She learned,

through what mysterious channel she did not say, that Miss Kennedy never shed a tear nor showed the least sign of emotion, but was as cold as a piece of marble.

There was some truth in the simile. Sybil felt stone indeed. Her father's zeal, Mrs. Kennedy's stately visits, even Mrs. Mush's friendly calls and genuine sympathy left her cold. By none of these was Mr. Dermot loved, and she knew it. Her heart opened and melted but to one, and this was a kind, self-constituted nurse, who watched day and night by the sick man's bed, whose tears flowed when his case seemed hopeless, whose face brightened with every glimmer of hope.

"Aunt, I love you," Sybil sometimes said to her. And on the day when Mr. Dermot was pronounced out of danger — though not without the intimation that perfect recovery was doubtful, and would at the best be the work of time — on the day when this qualified verdict nevertheless filled Sybil's heart with joy, so long un hoped for had it been, she flung her arms around Miss Glyn's neck, and, bursting into passionate sobs and tears, she cried,

"Aunt — aunt, I love you next to him!"

"Poor fellow!" said Miss Glyn, whose eyes were dim, "he was so strong, so handsome too; but you do well to cling to him as he is, Sybil, you do well, for on my word I believe he deserves it."

CHAPTER XXII.

THREE weeks after this day, Sybil was sitting along with Mr. Dermot, when he suddenly said to her,

"Sybil, I should not like to die, and yet I am afraid I must; I feel as if the hand of death were upon me. What a pity, Sybil," he added, looking out of the window at the radiant landscape, then down back again to her face, on which the sunset shone, giving it as a glow of heaven, "it is such a beautiful world, and life with you seemed so delicious. Sybil, sickness is a great betrayer of all manliness. I feel as lackadaisical as a girl of fifteen just leaving school. You see man is not made for such passive endurance; strife — strife is his element. And I have none here. I am in the very lap of kindness and of love. There never was so fond a nurse as Miss Glyn, nor so sweet a companion as Miss Glyn's niece. Sybil, I cannot bear to leave you!"

Sybil checked her tears and tried to smile.

"You shall not leave me," she said, "the doctor ——"

"My darling," he interrupted, with a sigh, "Doctors are the greatest deceivers. It is their trade not to tell the truth. But I would not talk of all this if I had not an object in view. My recovery will certainly be slow, and I may never recover. I wish that we may be married at once. I am a rich man, Sybil, and I want to leave you all I have if I die. Your father is not wealthy, and I much fear he will die poor —

and poor Miss Glyn has nothing to leave you; let your lot, at least, be safe."

"I do not want to marry you for your money," half angrily said Sybil.

"Nor do I, Sybil. I want you to marry me for myself, and to make me know the taste of that rare food, happiness. I have had a cold, hard life from youth, upwards, you see — a life of toil and solitude, and few pleasures, but no joys. I should like a change now, Sybil. I am wearied of all labour. We will do nothing when we are married, Sybil, but love, and perhaps travel."

"I should not like my husband to do nothing," said Sybil, reddening. "I should like him to work and be useful——"

"And honoured and respected," said Mr. Dermot with much irony.

"I should like that too," said Sybil; "though I could do without it; but, Mr. Dermot, I should like him to be true to God's gifts. And to think of a man of your mind, Mr. Dermot, doing nothing but travelling and loving a little girl like me!"

"Is shocking," he suggested. "I do not think so, Sybil. I tell you it is this sickness that takes all manliness from me; but I am like the lotus-eaters. Oh! rest is delicious, Sybil, and the gardens of Armida were no fable. Depend upon it, we find them whenever we shut out life's bitter cares, and take refuge in a fond true heart. Let Jerusalem perish, Sybil, or let better knights raise her fallen walls. I am sick of the din of war, and do not grudge me that all I care for now is a few happy days, since heaven will not grant me years — with you."

There was a sorrow in his fondness that went to Sybil's heart.

"I grudge you nothing — nothing," she cried, breaking into sobs and tears, and flinging her arms around his neck, "be happy with me, if I can indeed make you happy — days or years, as God wills; but, oh! Mr. Dermot, as you love me do not speak as if your love for me took all nobleness or purpose from you."

"It does not, Sybil. A girl like you never yet inspired so low a passion. But, Sybil, my hard fate so hems me in that you are all I can really care to live for. There are plenty of men in my case, Sybil, and they go to the dogs as a rule. Thank God, then, that He gave me a good little creature like you to be fond of, and happy with. We must have passions nine out of ten of us. Blest are they to whom passion comes not under the guise of cards, or wine, or ignoble desires, but under such an aspect as this," he added, smiling in her face.

"Will you never tell me your trouble?" she asked in a low voice.

"Yes, Sybil, when we are married. You would not have me if I told you now."

"You wrong me," said Sybil, her face flushing with pain, "you wrong me."

And she left his side, and for all his entreaties would not go back.

They sat thus apart in the grey twilight, when the door opened and Miss Glyn entered the room.

"How do you feel, Mr. Dermot?" she asked, sitting down by him.

He did not answer her at once. The sound of her voice struck him.

"I am better," he said at length, "and to-morrow I shall bid you good-bye, and return to Saint Vincent."

No hospitable entreaty passed Miss Glyn's lips. Mr. Dermot said gravely:

"You have something to tell me, Miss Glyn — had we not better have a light?"

"Yes — no — as you please," replied Miss Glyn, in a slightly troubled voice. "Sybil, ring for lights, if you please."

Sybil rang, and left the room. She went out into the garden, and sat on a bench outside, whilst the servant came up and placed a lamp on the table.

"You have something to tell me," again said Mr. Dermot.

He no longer leaned back in the arm-chair, but sat upright, pale, grave, and collected. Miss Glyn was, on the contrary, much agitated.

"Mr. Dermot," she said at length, "I am not a woman of many words; I must now speak abruptly and briefly. I have received an anonymous letter concerning you. Here it is. Are its statements false or true?"

She handed him an open letter; Mr. Dermot took it calmly, and in a clear and distinct voice he read aloud:

"The Mr. Dermot who is now lying ill at Miss Glyn's house, figured last July under circumstances of the strongest suspicion, in the coroner's inquest, which was held at Moonagh, Ireland, over the remains of Mr. Smith.

"Mr Smith was burned to death on the seventh of July, in Mr. Dermot's house. Mr. Dermot and Mr. Smith had a violent quarrel half an hour before the fire was discovered.

"Mr. Dermot's house was insured a week before Mr. Smith's *accidental death*.

"The coroner's comment was, that the case was one of *strong suspicion*; but the jury, according to his directions, returned an open verdict."

Mr. Dermot closed the letter, and returned it back to Miss Glyn. He was very pale, but he was also very calm.

"Mr. Dermot," impetuously cried Miss Glyn, "tell me you are not that man — I mean that Mr. Dermot."

"I am he," he answered composedly.

"And Mr. Smith was burned to death?"

"He was."

"In your house? — after he and you had quarrelled?"

"It was in my house; but we did not quarrel — Mr. Smith was loud and noisy, but there was no quarrel."

"And you had insured your house a week before?"

"Yes — just so; a week before, very fortunately, for it was valuable."

He spoke very composedly.

Miss Glyn looked perplexed.

"Then you were not suspected," she said; "that is all invention about the coroner's comment and all that?"

In a moment Mr. Dermot's face was in a flame. His eyes flashed, his lips quivered, his voice lost its composure.

"The coroner was my personal enemy," he said; "he hated me, and he made that hate good that day, Miss Glyn."

Trouble appeared in Miss Glyn's face.

"God help us!" she said, clasping her hands on her lap; "are you then a disgraced man, Mr. Dermot?"

Mr. Dermot looked at her with ill-subdued resentment. She could say it — she could dare to say it! She could taunt him with his shame by that insolent question.

"But of course you are," resumed the pitiless woman; "and that was why you came to Saint Vincent as Mr. Kennedy's brother — that was why your name was suppressed — God help us! I say again."

Mr. Dermot looked at her. The veins in his forehead swelled, his eyes flashed, anger trembled on his lip, and he said not one word.

"I pity you," resumed Miss Glyn; "but I can do no more — in justice to my niece, I must tell her father this."

"He knows it," sharply said Mr. Dermot.

"And knowing it, he gives you his daughter?"

"He does."

He spoke in a dry, hard voice.

"But Sybil does not know it," indignantly said Miss Glyn; "and she shall, sir — she shall! Sybil, where are you?"

Her voice was loud — louder than was needed. Sybil, who sat in the garden outside, had heard every word; and now opening the glass door, entered the room pale as death, but very calm.

"You need tell me nothing, aunt," she said in a

low voice; "I heard you both — I know it all — besides, I had long guessed it."

They both looked at her, not knowing how to construe her looks and her bearing. She seemed in no hurry to enlighten them. She stood between them, pale and still, in a mute sorrow, that silenced them both. Mr. Dermot spoke first.

"Sybil," he said, going up to her, and speaking very gently, "I need not tell you I am guiltless; but for all that you are free, free as air."

"Free!" she said, "free!" And she twined her arms around his neck, and clung to him as never she had clung before.

"Sybil, you will repent this," indignantly said her aunt.

"Never!" cried Sybil. "Mr. Dermot is not changed because he is slandered, and I will believe in him till I die! — till I die!"

He looked down at her raised face with mingled tenderness and reverence. This did not seem to him his little childish Sybil, whom he kissed and caressed with a future husband's fondness. The faith that burned in those dark eyes of hers was caught from no earthly flame. It was kindled in heaven, and now gave her young face something of sublime. Thus Agnes, thus Cecilia, the virgin martyrs, might have looked when they confessed their God, and smiled at the heathen. For surely that was never pure human love, to which the hour of trial gives not a touch of heaven.

"I have wronged you," he said, "I have wronged you. I should have told you this; but I was blind and selfish. I thought it would not be known, or that

if it were, men would be generous enough to hold me guiltless. Poor little Sybil! it was shameful to win your affection, knowing myself a disgraced wretch, whom a woman must blush to belong to!"

The truth rose from Sybil's heart to her lips.

"You know you need not blame yourself for that," she said. "I liked you long before you liked me. I gave myself long before you cared for me. Oh! Mr. Dermot, you know very well that I was yours all along, and you had but to take me!"

She spoke with a proud humility, that seemed to avenge him for all the scorns of fortune. He looked from her to Miss Glyn, and smiled with serene defiance.

"You see her — you hear her!" he said. "The strength of innocence itself is around her; an angel might as soon love Lucifer as this girl a murderer! I cannot give you an unstained name, Sybil, but my hand is as guiltless of that man's blood as this," he added, raising hers to his lips.

Miss Glyn seemed much staggered.

"Mr. Dermot," she said, "you may be innocent. I only say that appearances are very strong against you; but innocent or guilty, what right had you to bind your lot to that child's?"

"None," he sorrowfully replied. "None, but she was willing, and her father was willing too, and I could not resist the temptation. For you see, Miss Glyn, she has all that man can well desire; youth, a true heart, and more than the common share of beauty, and, to crown all, she loved me, and I saw it, and loved her ten times more for that love than for all the

rest. Another might have prized it less; but Fortune had not spoiled me."

"But, Mr. Dermot, you cannot marry her now," said Miss Glyn, "you cannot!"

"Oh! yes, I can," he replied, recklessly. "I do not expect to live very long. If I die I will leave Sybil money enough to wipe away the shame of my name; and if I live," he added, with some emotion, "this little girl loves me well enough to forgive me the sin!"

He kissed away Sybil's silent tears; then gently putting her by, he turned to Miss Glyn, and said calmly,

"Good-bye, Miss Glyn. I forgive you — I suppose I must, but it goes against me to say it. You have been the world to me, and though I never cared much for its good word, I find I can resent, even though I scorn its contumely. I do not ask that you should keep my secret. The hand that sent you that letter has many more such to send, and will not spare me. It tried to blast the fair name of a dying man, and thus sufficiently proclaimed its own cowardice and baseness. That hand has pressed mine once, and been very dear, so dear that if heaven had not sent me unhopedor compensation, I could loathe all human kind for its sake. I know its handiwork, and expect no mercy; but now the day has come when I too shall show none."

Sybil gazed at him in some fear. He looked stern and pitiless, and there was hate in his eye. She went up to him, and taking his arm, led him out into the garden.

"Do not," she entreated; "let us fly out of the

world somewhere, Mr. Dermot, but do not retaliate — let her be.”

“Sybil, I am not revenge — I am justice. I feel bound to overtake and punish her treason — as to flying out of the world with you, my darling, I would if I had the life and strength of a month back — but not as I am now. There is but one world for me to go to, child, and that’s the next; and the day on which I take that journey will be a bright day in Mrs. Kennedy’s history. But with me does not end her chastisement. Saint Vincent and all in and about it is mine, and shall be yours. She thought to turn me out of your father’s house, and if she stays in it she shall live on your bounty. Your father is poor, Sybil, very poor — his last store went in the furniture and the jewels; and as you love me, I charge you not to feed that woman’s sensual vanity with money of mine. Throw it into the sea, Sybil, before you do that. Marry again, be happy with another husband, let your children and his be enriched with my wealth. I grudge you nothing, my darling — nothing; but between me and the treacherous woman who has stabbed my honour there is mortal enmity. Do not answer me — I must see your father to-night — good-bye.”

He kissed her in the darkness, and walked away at a quick pace; and Sybil stood listening to his retreating footsteps like one entranced.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SLEEP did not come near Miss Glyn that night. Mr. Dermot's manner all but convinced her of his innocence; but innocent or guilty, she resolved that he should not marry her niece. Sybil's romantic generosity she derided as utterly foolish.

"It will not stand the test of Time," she thought. "Sybil is in love now, but later, when she finds herself stung at every turn by her husband's shame, she will repent her folly, and upbraid us all for having allowed her to commit it."

That sin Miss Glyn resolved to avoid by seeking Mr. Kennedy the very next morning, and informing him that no consideration should make her tolerate Sybil's marriage with Mr. Dermot.

Miss Glyn was prompt to decide, and no less prompt to act. She went off on her errand at once; but early though she was, Mr. Kennedy was out. Mrs. Kennedy, though not asked for, came down to receive her visitor. Her manner had a mixture of courtesy and concern that struck Miss Glyn.

"I trust, I hope Mr. Dermot has not had a relapse?" she said anxiously.

"No, thank you," drily answered Miss Glyn. "Do you know, Mrs. Kennedy, if your husband will remain out long?"

"I can form no idea, Miss Glyn; he may stay out the whole day, or be home within five minutes. And, pray, how is poor Mr. Dermot this morning?"

"Mr. Dermot left me last night."

Mrs. Kennedy's surprise was unbounded.

"Last night! How sudden! But surely he had not come back to Saint Vincent; and Sybil, what about poor, dear Sybil? Mrs. Kennedy supposed they would soon have her back too!"

Miss Glyn gave her a cold mistrustful look, and rose.

"I shall call again," she said shortly; and, without deigning to answer Mrs. Kennedy, she left. She did not go home. She went on to Saint Vincent, where she had business, and on her return she passed by the Abbey, and asked if Mr. Kennedy had come back. Narcisse replied in the negative, and being of a communicative turn, he graciously added,

"Monsieur Kennedy and Monsieur Dermot went out together this morning."

"Then Monsieur Dermot is here?" said Miss Glyn.

"Oh! yes. Monsieur Dermot arrived last night; and Madame Kennedy laughed, and said he looked just like a ghost."

Miss Glyn turned away grimly, and smiled in some scorn.

"Did Miss Cains think to impose upon *me*?" she thought as she entered her chaise and drove back to her own home. "She ought to know it is rather hard to do that."

Miss Glyn found Sybil in the garden, leaning over the gate, and looking out wistfully across the road over the broad moor. Her face was flushed, and her dark eyes had a full intent look, with which her aunt was struck. It did not seem to Miss Glyn that Sybil was fretting, and yet something ailed her.

"Sybil, what is it?" she asked.

"Nothing, aunt," replied Sybil with a little start.

"Sybil, I pity you — I even pity him; but you must submit to your fate — a hard one, I confess it, still, as I say, you must submit."

Sybil smiled wistfully.

"I mean to do so, aunt," she said, in a low voice, and making way for Miss Glyn to pass; she followed her in.

She was very quiet, though very grave, for the whole of that day. Neither her face nor her manner gave any clue to her feelings. She seemed to live within herself, "like a little snail within its shell," thought Miss Glyn, and looked as if she meant to remain there silent and close till better times should come. Apathy marked her bearing; she sewed assiduously, and never spoke. She did not even seem to fret; but looked like one whose barque drifts down a swift stream, and who is powerless to arrest its course.

Early the next morning, Miss Glyn went off to Saint Vincent again; but early though she was, Mr. Kennedy was out when she reached the Abbey. This time, however, he had left word that he would be home within an hour; and as the day was fine, Miss Glyn said she would take a turn in the garden and wait there. From the garden she soon wandered to the grounds. A bright sun lit the avenues of trees, and the blue sea sparkled in the distance. It was a lovely morning, both fresh and fragrant and redolent with summer; but Miss Glyn did not feel happy. Her errand was no pleasant one. She had taken a strong liking to Mr. Dermot during his illness, and now that

liking came uppermost, spite all her efforts to curb it; and if it did not make her repent her resolve, it rendered its fulfilment rather painful.

"I wish those birds would not chatter so much," impatiently thought Miss Glyn, looking up at a tree in whose boughs a happy pair were hidden; "but of course they know no better, little senseless wretches!"

As she came to this harsh conclusion, Miss Glyn was suddenly aware of Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Dermot, who were coming home through the grounds, and now stood within a few paces of her. She was much struck by their appearance. Mr. Kennedy's eye was dull, and his face was haggard.

"He did not sleep last night," thought Miss Glyn.

Mr. Dermot, on the contrary, looked far better and stronger than when he had left Miss Glyn's two days before. Perhaps he, too, had not slept, but wakefulness had left him all the power and energy of life. He bowed formally to Miss Glyn and looked her firmly in the face with his luminous grey eyes.

"Mr. Dermot is not going to die just yet," thought Miss Glyn, and the conviction strengthened her in her purpose.

"Well, Mr. Kennedy," she said, looking hard at him, "have I news to give, or have you?"

"Mr. Dermot has spoken to me," replied Mr. Kennedy, without looking at her.

There was a pause, then Miss Glyn said,

"And what about Sybil?"

"Nothing," sullenly answered Mr. Kennedy.

"Nothing! Do you mean that she is to marry Mr. Dermot all the same?"

This time Mr. Kennedy did not reply. Miss Glyn waxed both wroth and indignant.

"And so," she said, with a derisive smile, "you give your daughter to a disgraced man, and you do it with your eyes open — is it for his money, Mr. Kennedy? Never mind answering," she added, regardless of Mr. Kennedy's angry look, and Mr. Dermot's indignant flush. "All I say is this, Sybil shall not be sacrificed! I will cry it out in the streets before I allow it."

"Miss Glyn, I am a patient man," replied Mr. Kennedy, with a light in his eye, "but I will allow no interference in my domestic affairs."

"And I will not allow that child to be sold," obstinately said Miss Glyn; "take a step in this marriage, and I will rouse all Saint Vincent against you both."

Mr. Dermot looked her firmly in the face.

"Sybil and I were married this morning," he said.

Miss Glyn stared, her mouth opened, her arms fell, then a purple flush passed across her face; for a moment she was almost speechless, and looked almost senseless. When she recovered, she said with deep scorn,

"God forgive you both — I cannot. You have sold her," she said to Mr. Kennedy, "and you have bought her," she added, looking at Mr. Dermot, "and you shall both answer for it on the great judgment-day," she exclaimed, bursting into tears. "If there be justice above, you shall answer for it!"

Mr. Kennedy eyed her coldly, and said not one word; but Mr. Dermot's pale face flushed with pain.

He walked to and fro in the path, and coming back to the bench on which Miss Glyn sat, he stopped before her, and said with much emotion,

"As God is my judge, I did not buy this young girl who is now my wife. As He knows all hearts, I thought not of myself, but of her in this morning's act. I love her much, very much, Miss Glyn, far too well to tie her lot to mine if I could do otherwise. I am going away this afternoon, and Sybil is not coming with me. I may never return, though she need not know that, poor child! and in that case she will be a rich and young widow. If I live, I trust that my love for her, and her love for me, will give us some way of securing happiness beyond the reach of all slander. You will at least allow me to hope that she will find in me a more tender and faithful husband than she could ever have had in the Count de Renneville."

"Mr. Dermot, I pity you," replied Miss Glyn; "you delude yourself by thinking it was needful to Sybil's happiness that she should marry you. You are not going to die just to make her a rich widow. Besides, you would leave her every farthing you have without marrying her. No, Mr. Dermot, the plain truth is, you are fond of the poor girl, and as she is fond of you, you take advantage of her folly to get her. Sybil will never reproach you, but she will repent it bitterly, and perhaps you will see it, and have to bear the punishment of your selfishness."

Mr. Dermot could have answered this, for he had more reasons for marrying Sybil than he had stated to Miss Glyn; but he did not choose to enter into further justification.

"Think what you please," he said recklessly;

"Sybil is my wife now, and though we mean to keep our marriage private, if it pleases you to proclaim it, I for one am not ashamed of what I have done this morning."

"I shall not betray you," said Miss Glyn, coldly; "but where is Sybil?"

"You will find her in your house when you go back," replied Mr. Kennedy.

Miss Glyn shook her head.

"Mr. Dermot's wife ought to have a house of her own," she said ironically; "at all events, I decline to receive her. She must come back here, or go with her husband."

"She shall come here," sullenly said Mr. Kennedy.

"May I ask if Mrs. Kennedy knows this?" inquired Miss Glyn, with great stateliness.

"No," was Mr. Kennedy's sharp reply.

"Then my opinion is, that you cannot, without wronging Mrs. Kennedy, bring Mrs. Dermot into her house," said Miss Glyn, gravely; "and, indeed, I shall feel it my duty ——"

"Nonsense," interrupted Mr. Kennedy, losing his temper; "you meddle in what you know nothing of, Miss Glyn. This house is not Mrs. Kennedy's. It is Mr. Dermot's. His wife, not mine, is the mistress of it; and you are sitting in Mr. Dermot's grounds, and on Mr. Dermot's bench."

Miss Glyn rose, pale with anger.

"Mr. Kennedy, shall I tell you what I think of all this?" she cried, in her indignation; "I think it is you, and not Mr. Dermot, who killed Mr. Smith!"

We often speak, scarcely knowing what we say, and after we have spoken, we learn by their effect that our words were keen arrows with a sure aim. Miss Glyn remained aghast as she saw how fell a speech she had uttered. Mr. Kennedy's eyes rolled wildly, drops of perspiration stood thick on his brow, terror was in his whole aspect. Mr. Dermot's voice recalled him to himself.

"Scorn it," said his friend, "scorn it, James."

Mr. Kennedy drew a deep breath, and tried to laugh.

"Thank you, Miss Glyn," he said, thank you.

And Miss Glyn was too much shocked to speak, for in her heart she thought, "It is true he killed him, and he is in that man's power."

"I wash my hands of it all," she said, rising; "I could admire you, Mr. Dermot, if you had not paid yourself for your silence; and you, Mr. Kennedy, I could pity, if you had been more generous. As it is, take care of yourself. I am much mistaken if the writer of the letter I received the day before yesterday is not to be found within a mile of this spot."

"Miss Glyn, what is your meaning?" asked Mr. Kennedy, turning livid. "Am I to understand that you tax me with it?"

"You!" And Miss Glyn stared at him. "You! Don't be absurd, Mr. Kennedy, you know my meaning very well."

She walked away without further adieu, and Mr. Kennedy looked at Mr. Dermot as if to say, "Deny it — say it is false — deny it!"

But Mr. Dermot was mute, and Mr. Kennedy hung his head and bit his lip, for he too believed it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SYBIL was sitting in her room at her aunt's house, still amazed at the morning's work. The suddenness of this marriage took from its joy. Nor could she forget her father's face, still less Mr. Dermot's. She had yielded to their joint wishes, but her heart felt heavy and sad. Oh! happy were the brides who were wedded in the face of all, whom the joy of friends, and their cordial goodwill welcomed on the threshold of the new life. Ay! truly happy were they!

A knock at her door disturbed Sybil's thoughts. She took off her ring, which she had put on, and opened it. She saw her aunt's servant-maid, who handed her a slip of paper, on which Mr. Dermot had written, in English, "Come to me."

"He was waiting at the gate," said the girl. Sybil's eyes sparkled with joy. She did not know why he wanted her, but he bade her come, and it was happiness to obey him, on this the first day of their wedded life. She ran out bareheaded in the sun, and found him standing outside the limits of Miss Glyn's abode. She reached him breathless, and gave him a quick, anxious look.

"You have not put on your hat and cloak," he said, surprised.

"No. Did you come to take me away?" she cried, joyfully.

"I did."

"For good?"

"For good, as you say, Sybil."

He spoke sadly, but in her joy Sybil did not heed that. She thought they were going away together somewhere — out of the world, as she called it — and a weight of care left her with that thought. She flew back to the house, and came back to him in a few minutes. He took her arm and led her away.

"Shall I leave a message for my aunt?" asked Sybil, standing still.

"You need not; she knows we are married."

This was another relief. Sybil could not bear disguise or secrecy. But there was something in Mr. Dermot's face that soon checked her joy. She had noticed a clouded happiness about him when they were married that morning, but now it seemed to Sybil that the happiness was all gone, and that the cloud alone remained. She did not dare to ask where they were going. She walked by his side, her arm in his, and she felt sad and troubled.

A path led to the sea; this Mr. Dermot took. When they were both on the shore, within the shadow of the cliffs, he asked Sybil if she would sit or walk. Sybil felt faint, and she preferred sitting. He sat down by her side, and looking at her sadly, spoke.

"Heaven is my witness, Sybil, that when I first thought of asking you to become my wife, I never contemplated all this. I did not think that I should marry you in secret, and that I could not openly give you a home on your wedding-day. And what a wedding-day! If I wish to speak to you, I must do so in such a wild place as this, where the seamew, who screams around us, will never tell it. Poor little Sybil, the shadow of wrong never came near you, and just now I saw you give a start and a frightened look, lest any

one should come and find you sitting here with your husband. God forgive me, Sybil! I half fear that your aunt's bitter reproaches were justified, and that I thought of myself, and not of you, this morning."

"And why should you not?" asked Sybil, a little indignantly — "why should you marry me if I cannot give you some happiness? — though 'tis not much, I dare say, or you would not speak so."

Tears stood in her eyes as she uttered these words.

"Some happiness!" he repeated — "some happiness! Oh! Sybil, if I had only married you in the face of the world, and not by stealth — if I could only say to everyone, 'This is my wife,' and take you away somewhere —"

"Do," interrupted Sybil — "do, Mr. Dermot, take me away; I do not care where — only take me!"

"I will," he replied, taking her in his arms, and forgetting his hard lot in the sweetness of that fond entreaty — "I will, my darling," and for a moment he looked down at her, a proud and happy husband.

"And where are we going?" softly whispered Sybil.

The troubled look came back at once to Mr. Dermot's face. Alas! he was no blest lover bearing his young bride away to some calm retreat. He was a hunted man, who had married the girl he loved — not to have her, but to save her from a worse lot. He had made her his wife, not to spend happy days with her, but to take her out of her father's hands, and give her a safe refuge beyond the reach of Blanche Cains. Whatever Miss Glyn might think, Mr. Dermot had no illusions. He knew that if his days were numbered, as he thought, Sybil was too young not to marry again. She would marry, and, of course, she would love. The

wealth which he had amassed with painful toil, and was now leaving her, would enrich a happier man. Children, not of his blood, would play in those rooms where young Sybil had once called him Uncle Edward, and given him her unsought heart. And he would sleep in his dishonoured grave, not forgotten, perhaps, but surely never mentioned! These were bitter thoughts to a man in love, who had been wedded a few hours, and who, calm though he often looked, felt the passionate blood of youth flowing in his veins. He gently put Sybil by, and said, very sadly:

"You are right enough, Sybil; you can give me no happiness — none, for to have you so is very bitter; but for all that, you will never know how much I have loved you."

The passionate earnestness of his look, the still more passionate regret of his voice, stirred the depths of Sybil's heart.

"God himself joined us this morning," she said — "let us hold fast by that, and let the world go by."

"I cannot — I must not — I did not marry you for that," he replied, in a broken voice; "pride, honour, love — all bid me give you another destiny, my darling. Two days back I wanted you for myself, but after that letter I should not dare to wish for you so. It may be that some selfish hope or desire was in my heart this morning; but if so, it is not too late to atone for either. Do not look at me so reproachfully, Sybil. I may not always be generous — I may come some day and claim you, and take you away, and hide you, as the miser hides his gold, and then we will let the world go by, as you say."

"Be it so," said Sybil, smiling, undismayed at the dreary prospect.

"Yes, Sybil, be it so. But I have much to say — let me speak. Did you wonder, Sybil, that, when we parted this morning, I let your father take you to Miss Glyn's? I could not help it — I had much to do — I had my will to make."

Sybil felt sick and faint.

"Then you do think, Mr. Dermot," she said — "you do think that —"

She did not say what, but he knew her meaning, and was silent.

"God alone knows," he said at length; "but do not look so woful — above all, do not grudge me the thought that, if I could do nothing else for you, I could make you rich. Whether I live or die, you are a rich woman now, Sybil."

"Rich! — and if you die! — if you die, Mr. Dermot?"

She could say no more.

"And if I live," he said, gloomily — "if I live, scorned and dishonoured, Sybil?"

"Mr. Dermot," fervently cried Sybil, for she had not yet learned to call him otherwise, "God will clear you yet."

But Mr. Dermot heard, and did not believe her. He did not think that Providence always justified the innocent and confounded the guilty. If he was silent, was Providence bound to speak for him? There was iron in him, as he had once told Sybil, and he could bear his lot; but one aspect of that lot revolted him. It was that he should give his wife a disgraced name, and that he should entail that inheritance of shame on

children yet unborn. Passion and Hope had conspired to lure him on, but one was dead now, and the other, though strong, could not stifle conscience and pride. It was well for Sybil that she could not guess with what bitterness of heart he had made her his. She could not guess it, but still something she read in his troubled eye.

"Mr. Dermot," she implored, "let us go away and never be heard of more."

"There was a time when these things could be," he answered with bitter impatience; "now, what spot is there where slander will not pursue its victim? But let me speak on, Sybil — I have much to say, and time is passing. See what a line of foam and spray these receding waves have made on the shingle. They are rolling away from us."

"Yes," said Sybil, "and my short happiness with them — for you are going to leave me, Mr. Dermot, I know that."

"I must, to my sorrow. I thought to leave you at Miss Glyn's, but she compelled me to acknowledge our marriage to her, and she will not give a home to the wife of a disgraced man. And now, Sybil, mark my words. If I die, you are, by the tenor of my will, placed for ever beyond the reach of that woman."

"You shall not die — you must not!" cried Sybil. "And do not leave me here or anywhere. Do not forsake me."

"Forsake you! Why, every thought I have is watchfulness or tenderness for you!"

"Then watch over me yourself. If I gave you that right and that duty this morning, I gave it to none

other. You told me I was your treasure — deal with me as the miser deals with his gold, Mr. Dermot.”

“I cannot — I must not; not yet, at least, my darling. I have placed you beyond the reach of that woman, who would barter or betray you. I have made you rich, and the world which would not forgive my wife will be very lenient to my widow —”

“Then you married me for pity?” interrupted Sybil, pale as death — “you married me because you think you will die?”

“I may live, Sybil — I may come back to you with my burden of disgrace, and bid you share it. I wonder if you will think or say that I married you for pity when that day comes?”

“Then you will come back?” she said, with a sigh of relief — “you will come back?”

“Did you doubt it?”

“How can I tell? I thought I was your wife, bound to share your lot, whatever that lot might be. But when I hear you speak, I think I must have dreamed that we were married this morning.”

She spoke with sorrowful calmness, without reproach, but as one who states some sad fact beyond all remedy.

“You are my wife,” he said, deeply affected — “my wife, honoured and beloved, and whether I live or die I will convince you that you are infinitely dear to your husband’s heart.”

“I believe you — I must believe you!” she exclaimed, her tears flowing; “it would be too hard to think otherwise, for, Mr. Dermot, I feel sure that you will live — ay, and triumph over your enemies,” she

added, smiling through her tears; "and it would be too bitter to think myself a clog upon you then."

He wiped her tears away, and smiled too. The happy future her words called up made him half forget present sorrow. Oh! how sweet it would be to live an honoured man in that grey old Abbey, with this fond and true young wife for ever by his side. And it was possible, Hope whispered; stranger things had come to pass. Ever since Miss Glyn had taxed him with his shame, he had felt life doubly strong within him. Strength, will, purpose had returned. Why should he not live to prevail over Fate, and sit down to enjoy the prize he had snatched to-day? Ah! what a close that would be to the long and bitter story of the last year!

"Sybil," he said with a kindling look, "you will make a true wife. I came here dark and depressed; now I feel as if I must live and prevail against her. Do not think, however," he added with the defiant smile she knew of old, "that I meant to fly like a coward before Mrs. Kennedy? If I go, if I leave you, if I keep our marriage secret — it is to defeat her, Sybil. She sent that letter to Miss Glyn to prevent me from having you — let her think she has prevailed, and that I am beaten, else the evil spirit which is within her will know no bounds. Let her think it, I say. Your father and I have set a snare which she cannot escape. I go to act my part, but I would not go without securing your fate, my darling."

"Does my father know?" asked Sybil.

"He suspects her — I had no need to accuse her. Wretched woman! she does not know that my danger is his — that we stand and fall together. And he

would rather die than trust her. In that he does well. Have no faith in the wicked. They cannot be true."

Sybil turned very pale.

"How did Mr. Smith die?" she whispered.

"Sybil, I do not know — no more than you — but I cannot doubt your father."

"Ah! you have been grand — you have been generous!" she cried.

"No," he interrupted calmly; "but when suspicion fell on me I threw it on no other. I did that, and no more. Forget all that, Sybil. Let nothing so dark or so dismal be mentioned between us to-day. But if you love me, if you love your father, be prudent till I come back. Then I can defy her, I trust, and claim you."

"You will — you shall!" cried Sybil ardently; "no one shall doubt you, and she shall know nothing from me; and we shall be very happy yet."

He heard her smiling, and he surrendered himself to the dear illusion. He was not half deceived, and all the time he knew that the wakening was at hand, but he felt weary of foresight and sacrifice. He let Sybil grow eloquent on a golden future, which to her seemed as certain as if it lay within their grasp. He put by the certainty that they must part within a few hours, and he enjoyed the present time. The day was calm and fair, the waves danced joyously on the beach, and Sybil sat by his side and often turned towards him a radiant face. For if he could not deceive himself Mr. Dermot fully cheated her. He needed to act no part, to be once more the fond lover of a few days back. She forgot all he had been saying as we forget

baleful dreams, and went back to hope and joy as easily as a child. Compassion mingled with his tenderness, and forbade him to renew her sorrow.

"Let there have been sunshine on her wedding-day," he thought, "the darkness and the cloud will come soon enough."

And he, too, wore a happy look, and seemed to have put by all care.

And if fond vows and tender caresses could have confirmed Sybil's faith in the future, they were not wanted then. But these appeals to joys he might never possess, were more than Mr. Dermot could endure. It unmanned him to see and hear this girl whom he loved so fondly, sitting there by his side, recalling their pleasant friendship, and trusting to their married love with such calm faith.

"I believe you had better go in," he said, rising and trying to seem unconcerned. "See how far the tide is out!"

"Are you not coming in with me?" she asked doubtfully.

"I am going in, but not with you."

She did not oppose his wish. They walked on together for a while, then he left her still smiling.

"But I shall see you before you leave Saint Vincent?"

He laughed at the question, and walked away with a careless look. Sybil watched him till he vanished, and if she had dared, she would have called him back, for sudden fear had come over her as she thought:

"If I should never see him again!"

The presentiment was not all unfulfilled. That day Sybil saw Mr. Dermot no more, and when she rose the

next morning she found a slip of paper thrust under the door. "Good-bye! God bless you!" was all Mr. Dermot had written, and he was gone.

"Oh! if it were for ever," thought Sybil, with a deadly chill at her heart.

CHAPTER XXV.

NEVER, it seemed to Sybil in after-life, was there so dream-like a period of her existence as this, for never was the real world less, and that other world which lies within the compass of our own thoughts, more to her than it was then. A dark and troubled world she found it. One peopled with spectres and overshadowed with gloomy forebodings. Again and again she went over the tragic close of Mr. Smith's history, and again and again her heart sickened when she thought of the dark shadow which that sad end threw over her husband's life. Oh! would he ever stand clear once more in his honour and fair name?

Would he win back the love of that haughty princess, opinion, of whom he had once spoken to Sybil? She feared not. She hoped, and she despaired daily, and daily, too, the suspense and anxiety to which his lengthened absence and silence subjected her, told upon her. She grew so wan and pale that every one saw it, and every one, too, thought he or she could guess the cause of Miss Kennedy's sorrow. She was in love with Mr. Dermot, and Mr. Dermot had promised to marry her, and had broken his promise at the eleventh hour, and so Miss Kennedy was fretting. Thus, at least, the friends and visitors of Mrs. Kennedy,

those from whom she received, and to whom she gave parties and grand dinners, where Sybil sat like a pale little ghost, compelled to appear in mortal festivals — thus, at least, they construed the sad girl's altered looks.

Mr. Dermot had been gone exactly two weeks when Mrs. Kennedy gave one of her weekly dinners. Mrs. Ronald and a few more of her set were the guests. Mrs. Ronald had been silent concerning Sybil till then; but now she chose to speak.

"My dear Mrs. Kennedy," she said to her in her most amiable and confidential tone, "what is the matter with Miss Kennedy?"

Now Mrs. Ronald put the question in a manner which implied that she could have given the answer if she chose. Mrs. Kennedy sighed and gave Sybil, who sat at the other end of the table, pale and rather stern, a look full of tender, motherly compassion.

"She is a dear wayward little thing," she replied; "and there is no arguing with her, Mrs. Ronald. None."

"Mrs. Kennedy," said Mrs. Ronald, "I married a widower with grown-up daughters, who were all dear, good girls, but most provoking — I can feel for you."

Mrs. Kennedy smiled sweetly, and no more was said on that subject. But Mrs. Mush had watched them, and as soon as dinner was over, she coaxed Sybil out into the garden.

"My dear," she said, "I am going away to-morrow."

"To-morrow," interrupted Sybil. She had known it, but she had forgotten it too, as she forgot everything now.

"Yes, child, to-morrow: it is decreed that Saint Vincent is to be no abiding place for me — when your father wants me, he asks me; and when my time of usefulness is out, I must go."

"Dear Mrs. Mush, if ever I have Saint Vincent, you shall come to it and stay as long as you please," warmly said Sybil.

"You are very kind, my dear; but Mrs. Kennedy has a good hold of Saint Vincent, and isn't going to give it up just yet. However, as I said, I am going away to-morrow, and I must give you fair warning that Mrs. Ronald and her set are watching you. Be proud, feel much, show little; and if he should come back, be on your guard. He is a good and honourable man, but there may be reasons why he cannot marry, you see."

So she too knew or suspected his disgrace. Ay, Sybil remembered the *Moonagh Herald*, and the words she had read. Oh! God help them both! What a lot was theirs!

"And so, my dear," resumed Mrs. Mush.

"Mrs. Mush, I cannot bear it," passionately interrupted Sybil; "I cannot bear it."

"But if he should come back," persisted Mrs. Mush; she ceased rather abruptly, for Mr. Dermot himself was walking slowly towards them in the grey-ness of a shady path. And Sybil had to stand still, and not to spring towards him. She had to wait his coming, and greet her husband as an acquaintance or a stranger; whilst her heart beat with a joy that almost stifled her.

Nothing could exceed the composure of his manner as he bade the two ladies a good evening. He looked

as well, and as cool too, as ever. And he showed not the least emotion on seeing Sybil.

"Oh! how can he do it?" she thought; "how can he do it? Oh! if Mrs. Mush would but go!"

But Mrs. Mush did not go; she stayed on purpose with Sybil, and all three walked together towards the house. When they crossed the cloister, Mr. Dermot went up to his room, and Sybil and Mrs. Mush joined the guests in the drawing-room. Mrs. Mush seemed very much inclined to keep close to Sybil there too; but the young girl knew her weak point. She started an argument with the gentleman near whom she was sitting, a rather drowsy old man, who lingered over an idea. Mrs. Mush fell into the trap, and began talking away. Sybil, in the meanwhile, slipped out quietly, and ran breathlessly up to her room.

"I know I looked pale and ill," she thought; "and this grey barége makes me look worse. He likes me in white, and if I change my dress, who save he will see it?"

Sybil never dressed slowly. In ten minutes the change was effected — the grey barége was put by for the white muslin. She put a rose in her dark hair, she fastened another in her flowing sash, and the gladness of his return shone in her eyes, and gave her something beyond the tirewoman's art. "He will not think I look pale and ill now," thought Sybil, as she turned away from her mirror and blushed with secret joy at the fair image it showed her; "but perhaps he will see that I have changed my dress, and guess why. What if he does! Am I not his wife? — is he not my husband? Have I not a right to dress for him?"

She would not listen to Prudence, who whispered a remonstrance about the grey barége. She slipped out of the room into the half dark landing, and had scarcely gone a few steps when she found herself face to face with Mr. Dermot.

He gave a quick look round, then took her in his arms and kissed her gladly and fondly.

"Well?" she whispered breathlessly.

"Well," he replied, "I am like a man who holds a bird in his hand. If he opens his fingers so, it goes, and his trouble is vain. Sybil, I come back to defeat her — be patient two days — I ask for no more."

Sybil did not question, though she longed to know.

"It may be in an hour, and it may be in two days," he resumed; "she cannot escape me — be patient, Sybil."

"She is always out," said Sybil; "she is going out to-morrow, and after to-morrow there will be a concert rehearsal here."

"Sybil, no opportunity must tempt us — she must know or suspect nothing."

"Very well," replied Sybil.

"I may go away again, and you must not fret," he said.

"Very well," she replied again; but she spoke rather faintly.

"And now you must leave me and go down."

"Now! And will you go away without my seeing you?"

She looked at him with a sort of terror.

"You mean to-night? Why, I am going down too."

I am curious to see how far the kind lady has proceeded in my absence."

He spoke with his defiant smile — a smile that always became him, because it was ever tempered with sweetness. Sybil lingered to look at him.

"He will never admire me as I admire him!" she thought — "never!"

Until then Mr. Dermot had not noticed the change in her dress, but as she stood thus at the head of the staircase, her hand on the banisters, her head half turned to look at him, he suddenly perceived the rose in her hair, the flowing sash, and the white muslin. He gave her a quick, keen look, which made her turn crimson.

"My poor darling," he sighed, "what have you been doing?"

Sybil felt ready to cry with mortification and shame.

"Has anyone seen you so?" he asked.

"No," faintly replied Sybil.

"Then pray go and resume the grey dress," he entreated, seeming much relieved — "pray do, Sybil."

Sybil went. All her little joy and triumph were gone in a moment. If she had looked back, and seen him standing there, his look following her light young figure going down the dark landing, Sybil might not have felt so sad, for as he looked, Mr. Dermot thought:

"Ah! if it were not for this cross, all this would be very sweet — too sweet!"

For sweet are youth and beauty, and sweet is love, with all its little fond follies. And Sybil did not know till years later how her white dress and her rose had

moved her husband's very heart. Sadly and heavily she put by her little finery, and resumed the gray barége. She saw no sign of Mr. Dermot this time when she went down. He was in the drawing-room when she entered it, talking to Mrs. Ronald, who congratulated him on his return.

"You are back in time, Mr. Dermot," she said; "we are going to have a concert in the new casino before it is opened to the public — shall we have the pleasure of hearing you?"

Before Mr. Dermot could reply, Mrs. Kennedy said:

"Mr. Dermot has a very fine voice indeed."

"Then we must hear him," rejoined Mrs. Ronald, with the graciousness of an empress.

Mr. Dermot received these tokens of favour with quiet reserve. But Sybil looked at him with happy, admiring eyes. Indeed, Mrs. Mush considered her looks so expressive, that she came and whispered a warning.

"My dear, do be careful," she entreated.

Sybil turned upon her with a flashing look.

"Careful, Mrs. Mush?" she said — "careful of what?"

"My dear, see how people are looking at you."

"They are welcome; but, Mrs. Mush, does it not seem to you that Mrs. Ronald is very civil to him this evening?"

"My dear, Mr. Dermot is universally admired, and no wonder!"

Sybil's cheeks glowed. She looked at Mrs. Mush with a happy gratitude nothing could check.

"My dear," urged the lady, "do see how cold he is to you."

Sybil smiled in pretty scorn, but, for all that, she felt it. Yes, there was marked coldness in Mr. Dermot's manner to her. His eyes shunned hers, or fell upon her as if they saw her not. In vain she knew why — she could not bear it. When the party broke up, she hoped that, whilst Mrs. Kennedy was engaged with her guests, he would at least say a few words to her — words which anyone might hear, but which would gladden her heart. She rose, and went up to a table not far from where he stood, but he did not seem to see her. She looked at him, and could not catch his eye. She could read his face, however, and she was struck with its meaning. The animation which it had displayed a while back was all gone, and in its stead Sybil read a rigid sternness, that almost frightened her. She softly went up to him, and laying her hand on his sleeve, looked up questioning. He looked down at her silently.

"What are you thinking of?" she whispered.

"That, if she likes it, Sybil, all these people will spit at me to-morrow."

He spoke low, though there was no one near them. Sybil drew back with a reproachful look, which he did not heed. Lest she should be tempted to address him again, he walked away, and Sybil remained standing there in mute grief. What was her childish fondness to this bitter gnawing care? — Ah! nothing — truly nothing!

"I must be reasonable — I must be calm," thought Sybil, as she went up to her room. I must remember

what he has been, not what he is now, with that thought upon him. I must be reasonable."

Alas! what has reason to do with such things? Sybil sobbed herself to sleep that night, and dreamed that Mr. Dermot came and stood by the bed on which she lay sleeping, and looking down at her, said,

"I wish you were dead, Sybil, and that I were dead with you."

And who knows if, as he sat in his room unable to sleep, thinking of his young wife, and the doubtful future, who knows if some such thought was not upon Edward Dermot.

But light is the heart of youth, and when Sybil awoke the next morning, hope was strong within her, and prudence, alas! was very far away. "You will come again to Saint Vincent?" she gaily whispered, as she bade Mrs. Mush good-bye in the morning, and the joy with which her husband's return had filled her shone in her whole aspect throughout that day. In vain she saw that Mrs. Kennedy watched her incessantly, in vain she perceived that Mr. Dermot shunned her with the most obstinate care. Sybil could not help being and seeming glad. Moreover, Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy were going out that night, and if she stayed at home, he surely would never resist the temptation of seeking her society! So when it was time to dress and go, Sybil was unwell, and stayed within. And this was no fiction. Her joy had made her feverish and restless, and no one who saw her flushed cheeks, and unnaturally bright eyes, could doubt it.

"If you are not well, go to bed," drily said her father. Mrs. Kennedy said nothing, but smiled coldly.

Mr. Dermot was not present, but surely he must

know she was staying within! She breathed freely when Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy went up to dress, and too impatient to wait for their departure, she went out into the grounds, reckless of the chill white mists which stole from the sea. The scent of a cigar led her down a dark and narrow path.

"Mr. Dermot," she said, softly.

She got no answer, but Sybil was sure she heard a receding step. He could not be shunning her on purpose! No, that was impossible! But the step was going towards the house, so she went back to her room, and left the door ajar to listen. For some time all was quiet; then Mrs. Kennedy's silk dress rustled down the staircase, and Mr. Kennedy's voice was heard below, and in a few minutes more carriage wheels rolled away from the gates of Saint Vincent, and all was still. With a beating heart, Sybil softly stole downstairs. She timidly entered the drawing-room. It was dark, and seemingly vacant. "Mr. Dermot," she softly called, but she got no answer. Twice she repeated the summons in vain. Sybil would not be disheartened. She went over all the rooms, she even ventured into the dark cloister, and the chill garden. There she got the key of the enigma. A light burned in Mr. Dermot's room, and she could see his shadow moving across the curtains. She watched him for a time, hoping the light would vanish, and that he would come down; but after taking a few turns around the room, Mr. Dermot sat down and began to write, as Sybil could see from the motion of his hand.

"He heard me in the garden, but he does not want to see me," she thought, with a swelling heart. Noiseless as a shadow she crept back to her room, and

there gave way to her grief. She did not think that perhaps Mr. Dermot feared his own imprudence even more than he dreaded hers; she thought: "I have wearied him with my fondness, and now he is tired of me!" Alas! Mr. Dermot had had neither time nor opportunity to grow tired. His had been no blessed honeymoon, but a season of sorrow and tribulation. This atoning thought also came to Sybil's mind; but, ingenious in self-torment, she answered it: "Yes, that is it! His cares have been too much for his love. His heart has grown wearied and languid, and there is no room for me! Oh! I cannot bear it! — I cannot bear it!"

Time passed. The hours went by. Twelve struck. If she had had a vague hope of seeing him again, it vanished. She flung herself on her knees and asked for strength to bear this great anguish, this doubt of his affection, which, lulled awhile, had again sprung up, bitter and tormenting; but strength came not, and she only wept and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Sybil," said his reproachful voice.

She looked round with a start, and saw Mr. Dermot standing at the door, and looking in at her gravely.

Sybil rose, ashamed and mute. Alas! what construction would he put on this grief? Could she be always telling him that he did not care for her? Is not the reproach of coldness mere begging for love? But she needed to say nothing. He knew all, and said so.

"I know what you feel and think," he said, sadly; "but do not doubt me, Sybil. Remember that, much

as I love you, that love cannot be everything to me just now. Do not doubt me."

Sybil could not answer him for mortification. Was it her part to be ever a suppliant for love? If he could not give it in that full measure which she craved, ought she not, even though a wife, to bear her fate with a woman's pride?

"I do not want your love for me to be everything to you," she said a little indignantly; "I only want you to remember that when you married me you took me to share your lot and your counsel, and I complain that you do neither. You go, and I do not know whither. We part, and I do not know when we are to meet again. I do not complain that you do not love me, Mr. Dermot, but that you do not trust me."

Alas! Sybil was truthful, but this was not quite the truth. Sybil did complain in her heart that her husband did not love her enough; but she could not bear to say so, and she built up her wrongs on his want of confidence. Mr. Dermot believed her, and was pained. He came forward, and, leaving the door ajar, to hear any coming step, he said tenderly,

"Was that why I heard you sobbing through my open window? My darling, you shall know everything later."

"Ay, there it is," replied Sybil, waxing wroth; "I am such a baby that you cannot trust me?"

"No, no, that is not it," he said soothingly; "but you are open as day; and how she has been watching you since I came back! Sybil, till I can defy her to-morrow, a word, a breath, may undo me."

"Then tell me nothing, Mr. Dermot."

She spoke bitterly, yet Mr. Dermot was tempted to

take her at her word, but he remembered the weeping he had overheard, and of which her cheeks still kept traces, and he said,

"And if I do not tell you, how will you feel, Sybil?"

He stood by her side, and looked down in her face. She looked up at him and smiled.

"Tell me — trust me," she half whispered.

He could not resist her. The weakness, the fondness of his love were strong upon him then. He forgot the spot, and the hour, and Hatred, ever on the watch; he only remembered that his young wife looked up at him with those soft beseeching eyes, and with that entreating smile.

"You little syren," he said fondly, "I must be on my guard against you another time. And yet it will be of no use. You will shed a few tears, or coax me, and of course I shall yield — as I do now."

"But you are not telling me, sir."

"Well, that proof of her treachery which I went to seek I shall have within a few hours. I was not mistaken — her brother wrote that letter, and we can tax her with it. I do believe, Sybil, that when the serpent has lost its fangs it will be harmless. Whether she submits or not, she leaves this house. To-morrow, Sybil, we shall be alone in Saint Vincent"

Sybil felt breathless. To-morrow! She had thought of that future as of a thing remote and almost doubtful, and now it was to be to-morrow! The new life was to begin so soon! He watched her troubled face, and asked what ailed her.

"I am afraid. I fear, I do, that you have made a poor bargain in me. I am full of faults. I am way-

ward and unjust. Indeed, I have a hundred imperfections."

"I always heard that voyages of discovery were pleasant things," he replied smiling. "I have no doubt that you will give me a variety of experiences, and as we shall live much alone, it is well that we should not have too much monotony."

She knew what he meant by "living much alone."

"Ah! what a life for you, Mr. Dermot," she said, looking up at him with sad wistful eyes, "what a fate for you, who were meant to move amongst and to rule your fellow-men — to have nothing left save a poor little girl such as I am!"

"Sybil, it is something to be lord of a true heart. It is something to have love. I know that many weary of that empire and that possession, but I do not feel as if I should ever weary of you. It seems impossible," he added, looking down at her with infinite tenderness. "I know that youth and beauty will fade — and more's the pity when both are so charming — but yet I could not grow tired of you, Sybil. If you were no longer pleasant to look at, you would still be delightful to listen to."

"Ah! but suppose I get dumb?"

"There is not much fear of that, my dear."

Sybil laughed, and she had a laugh both musical and low, which justified Mr. Dermot's praises. It was, indeed, her happy fate to charm all his senses. There was something in her whole being which harmonized with his tastes and feelings. Long before he loved her, he had admired, and half-envied the man who would win so bright a prize. And now he liked her fair young face and her dark eyes, the pretty turn of

her neck, and her light step and graceful carriage. The very sweep of her skirts had something in it that was a pleasure to his eye, as the sound of her voice was sweet in his ear.

"Sybil," he said, from the fulness of his heart, "I know you think I do not care enough about you — but believe me, hard as my fate is, I shall be very happy, deeply happy to-morrow. I mean to go to Lethe and drink a full cup, and forget all save that, if my fate is hard, I have snatched one prize, at least, from her reluctant grasp."

He gently laid his hand on her shoulder, and looked down at her. He loved her much, very much, and he forgot to leave her.

The rustling of a silk dress roused them both. Mr. Dermot knew what it was, and without moving his hand from Sybil's shoulder, slowly and calmly turned round.

She stood before them, haughty and smiling in her ironical triumph. She had just come home from Mrs. Ronald's party, and was splendidly dressed. Her rich white silk swept the floor, and half filled Sybil's room. She was covered with jewels, and a diamond star sparkled with every motion of her fair head.

"I beg your pardon," she said, graciously, "I am very rude, but hearing a man's voice in Miss Kennedy's room, I was so surprised that I came in without knocking."

"Mrs. Dermot's room," he quietly corrected.

She looked at them both, and smiled again, but very bitterly. So they had baffled her after all — they were married.

"Mrs. Dermot," she repeated with ironical emphasis, "you amaze me, I did not know that this lady did me the honour of being my guest."

"The honour is hers, not yours," he replied, in the same quiet tone; "for she is the hostess, and you are the guest, Mrs. Kennedy."

"This house is yours, Mr. Dermot?"

He bowed. She turned to the door, and her voice rang loud and clear on the landing.

"Mr. Kennedy!" she called; "Mr. Kennedy!"

He was slowly coming up the staircase, and he now stood at its head confronting her. She faced him in all her imperious beauty.

"This house is Mr. Dermot's?" she said.

"It is."

And his voice and look were equally sullen.

"And how dare you bring me to Mr. Dermot's house?" she asked, her eyes flashing with fury.

"And how dare you, Madam, question my right to bring you anywhere I choose?" he replied doggedly.

She looked at him in scornful amazement, then turned away.

"Of course you know he is your daughter's husband," she said as she passed by him.

Mr. Kennedy looked at her moodily, without replying. She was jealous — he knew she was jealous.

"After that," she continued, with a short disdainful laugh, "I must wonder at nothing."

She went on and entered her room.

"What wretched folly brought you here?" angrily asked Mr. Kennedy, addressing Mr. Dermot; "come down, I want you."

He went, but Mr. Dermot lingered behind.

"Oh! I have ruined all!" pitifully exclaimed Sybil. "Be angry with me — very angry, Mr. Dermot — it will do me good."

Angry! There was no anger in his downward gaze. She had ruined all, as she said, or rather the tenderness of his love had conquered his prudence, and destroyed all his plans, but he could feel no anger.

"So have perished conspiracies," he said, looking down at her face flushed with weeping; "a few tears, a fond prayer, have undone the deepest scheming of the wise. Whose is the weakness and the folly, man's or woman's?"

"Ah! do not say that I have undone you!" she exclaimed, piteously — "do not!"

"What am I to say, then? Neither your father nor I can tax her with her guilt till its proof lies within our grasp. It would not be safe to do so. She is a reckless woman, and to drive her desperate might ruin all. Her brother will write to-morrow to a man in Saint Vincent, and that letter I can get by not seeming to care for it. But let her know or suspect so much, and I cannot stretch a finger to secure it. Till I have it I am at her mercy. She does not know all, but she knows too much. She can spread it over all Saint Vincent that I have been suspected of a foul crime — and can I deny it, Sybil? There lies my weakness and her strength. And there is everything to exasperate her. She knows you are my wife, and that this house is ours. She knows, I dare say, that her husband is poor — well, let her do her worst. Since I was so foolish as to enter your room, and put

us both in Mrs. Kennedy's power, I must pay the penalty."

"But you are not angry with me?" she said again.

"Angry! — poor child! — angry with you, who are the victim of it all? No, Sybil, no — ten times no. Only, be prepared for sorrow and humiliation, for both are in store for us. That is your father calling me — good night."

His lips touched her forehead, and he was gone. Sybil flung herself on her knees, and wept as if her heart would break.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THERE was wrath in Mrs. Kennedy's heart, and jealousy in her husband's, and Sybil grieved in her room, whilst Mr. Dermot smoked in the cloister; but for all that, the concert rehearsal was to take place, and there was no talk of putting off so vital an item of Mrs. Kennedy's social duties. She went off to Saint Vincent herself early in the morning. She told her maid the pastry-cook required her last instructions, and that she could trust so important a matter to no one else; but excellent as her motives were, Mr. Kennedy would probably have disapproved of this early walk had he known of it in time. He was out himself, however, and only learned it when his wife came back, and they met at the gate.

"May I ask what took you out?" he inquired, sharply.

"I went to the pastry-cook's, dear," she replied, with a smile.

The last night's storm seemed to have passed from her mind. She looked as happy and as good-humoured as ever. But though her husband smiled too, he did not trust her. They entered the house together, and parted in the hall, Mr. Kennedy to enter his sitting-room, his wife to go upstairs and consult with Ralph.

"Now what ought I to wear?" she said, seeming much perplexed; "I am tired of blue — besides, this is only a rehearsal, and I am at home, and must not be fine, must I, Ralph?"

When Mrs. Kennedy said she was tired of blue, it was sure proof that she wanted to wear white. So Ralph promptly suggested a delicate white silk, of almost gauzy texture, as the very thing for her mistress.

"Yes, but you must take off the trimming, Ralph. It must be quite plain."

To take off the trimming, and, at the same time, not injure the dress, was a work of time and patience, which required the joint exertions of Ralph and her mistress. It was nearly completed, however, when a sound of voices in the hall below attracted Mrs. Kennedy's quick ear. She rose, went out on the landing, and listened. She heard a heavy step, and the shrill voice of Denise expostulating.

"I tell you Monsieur must sign the book," said a man's rough tones.

"And I tell you to come again. Monsieur is busy."

The man declared, with an oath, he would do no such thing.

"And what is in the box?" urged Denise.

"Can't you look at the paper? Newspapers, I believe; yes, newspapers, that is it. Odd to send newspapers all that way, eh?"

Mrs. Kennedy heard no more, for her husband's voice now mingled with that of the other speakers. She looked over the banisters, and saw him in the hall directing the railway porter to carry the box into his sitting-room. It was useless to linger now, yet she went back to her room very slowly, pausing to think with every step she took. What could Mr. Kennedy want with newspapers?

Mr. Kennedy, after paying and dismissing the railway-porter, entered his study, and opened the box with the key he had received along with it. It was full of newspapers. Yes, there they were, these soiled, half torn numbers of the *Moonagh Herald*, all bearing the same date, all containing on the third column of the fourth page a paragraph entitled "Latest Particulars," and which Mr. Kennedy knew but too well. How he hated these wretched papers, stained with public-house beer, thumbed with peasant fingers, and which had cost him dearer than his wife's diamonds. He wondered if he could trust the agent who had hunted them out of their obscurity for him; he wondered if, purposely mingled as they were with other worthless papers, the French custom-house officers had detected and read them; and, above all, he wondered what secret foe it was who was thus compelling him to seek out the black spot of his life.

"Mr. Kennedy," sweetly said his wife, looking in, "you are wanted."

He thrust the papers back into the box, locked it hastily, and looked at her. The calmness of innocence was on her face.

"Who wants me?" he asked.

"One of the clerks."

"Where is he?"

"He is gone back to the counting-house — I undertook to be messenger."

"I shall go presently."

He thought she would leave him, but she sat down and began talking of the rehearsal. He rose, still she did not move.

"You are not dressing?" he said.

"Oh! there's plenty of time — I shall take a turn in the garden with you."

She left the room and waited for him outside; but, softly though he did it, she heard him locking the door and taking out the key.

"The window is open," thought Mrs. Kennedy.

They went out into the garden together. The day was fine, and Mrs. Kennedy was merry. She walked with her husband till they were in sight of the counting-house, and she talked and laughed all the way.

Mr. Kennedy was silent.

"What ails you?" she said coaxingly; "you are quite grim — I cannot let you be grim, darling."

Her handsome face was close to his. He kissed it and seemed very fond, but there is little fondness where there is fear, and Mr. Kennedy feared his wife just then.

"I think you had better go in now," he said.

"I suppose I must. Come back a little way with me."

"I cannot, my love — we have no time to spare. The people will be coming."

"That tiresome concert!" she said. "Don't be long."

"Not longer than I can help, my love."

She walked away slowly, but no sooner was she out of sight than she ran. Instead of crossing the garden she turned into the cloister. It was sunlit and quiet. Mrs. Kennedy stole like a shadow along the arched gallery till she reached the window of her husband's sitting-room. It was ajar, and, pushing it wide open, she was going to step up on the ledge when she saw Mr. Dermot leaning against the wall, and smoking quietly. He was not looking at her, but he must have seen her. What was he doing there? Watching, no doubt, whilst her husband was away. She stood still a minute, wondering if he would go; but Mr. Dermot did not stir, and Mrs. Kennedy was compelled to turn back.

"Let him watch," she thought defiantly; "he will find that I have been beforehand with him."

She thought, too, that Mr. Dermot could not stay there for ever, and that it would be hard if she could not find some other opportunity before the morning was out. But vigilant though she was, that opportunity did not come. Twice she and Mr. Kennedy met near his sitting-room door, and twice each baffled the other; for Mrs. Kennedy wanted to ascertain the contents of the box, and Mr. Kennedy to destroy them. He longed for fire to consume these treacherous tokens of the past, and yet he did not dare to go and lock himself in and burn them at once on the hearth. This was summer time, the flames and the smoke would betray him, not merely to his wife, but to Mr. Dermot, to whom the presence in Saint Vincent of these papers was unknown. Besides, a little while more, and the guests would be coming. He could do it when they were gone — better still, when the whole house was

fast asleep that night. It was one then; all the heat of noon was abroad, and never did lover long for the darkness which was to bring him to the trysting place, as Mr. Kennedy longed for the silent loneliness of that night. In the meanwhile he was alive to every sound and token about the house; above all, he watched his wife.

Mrs. Kennedy was very busy. She seemed resolved, indeed, that this, if it was to be her last appearance as the mistress of Saint Vincent, should be a triumph. The so-called rehearsal was, in reality, a brilliant though select party. Mrs. Kennedy showed the greatest anxiety about it, and no doubt because Mr. Dermot had a fine voice, she twice asked Denise if he had not come back, for he had been out since twelve.

"What do you want him for, Blanche?" asked her husband, laying his hand on her shoulder.

She looked round full in his face, and smiled rather bitterly.

"Surely the master of the house ought to be present," she said.

"Yes, but what do *you* want him so particularly for, Mrs. Kennedy?"

"And why do *you* not want him?" she retorted; "he is your son-in-law, Mr. Kennedy!"

"And your brother, Blanche — where is your brother?"

She stared, her lips parted, her colour faded beneath his keen look. She had never spoken of that brother to her husband — how did he know of his existence? Mr. Dermot must have told him, and if

so, how far had his revelations extended? Her colour slowly returned, her eyes sparkled.

"I am much obliged to you for the inquiry," she said, with a smile. "I trust my brother will make his appearance some day."

"I trust he will have no cause not to do so," significantly replied her husband.

He left her and walked upstairs, and his wife heard him knock at his daughter's door.

She did not take time to think, discovery hemmed her in, and she resolved to forestall it by securing at least her revenge. This time she would stop at nothing. She tried the door of her husband's sitting-room, it was still fast, but she remembered the window through which she could have entered it so easily a few hours ago. She went round to the cloister. This time Mr. Dermot was not smoking there. The cloister was vacant, and the window was half open. In a second she stood on the ledge, and jumped into the room. In another moment she was on her knees on the floor, ready and resolved to break the box open. But there was no need to do so. In his hurry and alarm, Mr. Kennedy had locked the box without fastening the hasp, and she had but to raise the lid in order to be mistress of its contents. She laughed aloud on seeing the heap of papers it contained. What blindness, what infatuation, had brought these *Moonagh Heralds*, which she had never been able to secure, so scarce had they become, within her reach? "They must be mad!" she thought, "they must be mad!" She took two, and rose to go; but she could not bear to leave with so poor a prey. She came back and took three more, and as she reached the window she

returned to take another. Fear of immediate, not ultimate detection, alone prevented her from taking the whole. Her hatred was strong, and she felt as if nothing could sate her revenge.

Mrs. Kennedy went up to her room; Ralph's task was finished, and her mistress could lock her door and examine her booty. The *Moonagh Herald*s all bore the same date. She looked at one. In a moment she found what she wanted — the coroner's inquest on Mr. Smith.

This event, though so little known abroad, had produced a sensation in Moonagh. It filled up three columns of this obscure paper, and had evidently taken a strong hold of the public mind. And how terribly suspicious it looked! True, it ended in an open verdict, but that open verdict was the death of Mr. Dermot's fame! Mrs. Kennedy's eyes sparkled. He had cheated and deceived her. He had not given her his confidence; he had not lamented her treason, but had at once sought and found consolation in another love. Above all, he had singled out the girl whom she would have denied him for ever; he had married Sybil, and he was the master of Saint Vincent! For all these sins he should now suffer. Anonymous letters might be despised, but who would dare to impugn the cruelly accurate testimony of this *Moonagh Herald*, which described Mr. Dermot's person, and gave the very colour of his hair, as he appeared at the inquest. She felt no pity for him, not an atom. She took the six newspapers, made six separate packets of them, and, lest her husband should detect her theft, she resolved to dispose of them that same day. She unlocked her door, rang for her maid, and began dressing; and

even Ralph noticed in what high spirits her mistress was.

Whilst she triumphed, there was sorrow in Sybil's heart. She resolved not to appear at the rehearsal. She was weary of all this, and almost longed for some catastrophe to end it. In that mood her father found her, when, leaving his wife, he went up to the room and bade her dress and come down.

"I cannot," she replied, apathetically.

He pressed her, still she resisted. At length he said,

"You must. Dermot said you should."

Sybil only half believed it, but that half belief ruled her, and she hesitatingly said she would see. As he left her, Mr. Kennedy passed by his wife's door, and heard her talking and laughing within.

"Why is she so merry?" he thought, with an anxious frown; for it had come to this between him and Mrs. Kennedy, that for some time past he had never seen her glad without feeling a secret dread. At once his thoughts flew back to the papers below. It seemed impossible that she should have touched them, yet he could not tell. He went down, tried the door of his room, and found it fast. "Shall I burn them now, or wait till night?" he thought, hesitating. He had not time to resolve the question. A carriage drew up at the gates, and from where he stood he saw Mrs. Ronald alighting, whilst Miss Spencer remained in the carriage. What did she come so early for, and why did the companion remain behind? It could bode no good, and might certainly bode evil. But none better than Mr. Kennedy knew how to rule his countenance; and it was with the most genial, cheerful smile that he

went to meet Mrs. Ronald. She was cold and stately, but Mr. Kennedy saw nothing of it.

"May I request five minutes' private conversation with you, Mr. Kennedy?" she said gravely.

"Certainly, my dear madam — pray come up to the drawing-room."

"I want to be alone with you, Mr. Kennedy — alone, before the rest of the company comes."

Mr. Kennedy took out the key of his sitting-room, and showed Mrs. Ronald in.

"Mr. Kennedy," said that lady, when she was seated, "allow me to ask who Mr. Dermot is?"

"A gentleman of good family, Mrs. Ronald, and my friend," was the stiff reply.

Mrs. Ronald looked a little flurried, and said in a less authoritative tone,

"Then I suppose this cannot apply to him."

She handed Mr. Kennedy an open letter, in the same handwriting as that which had been sent to Miss Glyn, and which ran thus:

"Is Madame de Lonville aware of the real character of the gentleman who resides at Saint Vincent? Is she aware that he is suspected of the foulest crime? Is she aware that a year ago he was publicly accused of murder in Ireland? Is she aware that the unfortunate Mr. Smith was burned to death, and that Mr. Dermot was accused of having set fire to the house? But, no, Madame de Lonville cannot know it. Let her therefore take the warning of
"A FRIEND."

Drops of anguish and fear gathered on Mr. Kennedy's forehead, but he was silent.

"This letter," resumed Mrs. Ronald, "was brought to me an hour ago by Madame de Lonville. She came, apparently, to have it translated, but I may as well tell you that the poor woman's failing is talking and news-spreading, and that she had been all over Saint Vincent with it before she came to me. It was thrown in through her open parlour window this morning, by whom no one knows."

But Mr. Kennedy knew; he knew very well who had done this. Now, however, was not the time for resentment, but for vigilance, and a bold front. He looked at Mrs. Ronald, and smiled.

"And do you attach any importance to this wretched slander?" he said.

His tone was cold and careless. That carelessness undid him. Mrs. Ronald was offended.

"Mr. Kennedy," she said, rising, "I despise anonymous letters, but I regard opinion, and I warn you that, if you continue to make Mr. Dermot your guest, you will find yourself alone in Saint Vincent."

"Mr. Dermot and I will part in a day or two," ambiguously replied Mr. Kennedy.

"I hope so, for your sake, Mr. Kennedy," pointedly said Mrs. Ronald — "and I hope so, too, for that of Mrs. Kennedy. Indeed, Mr. Kennedy, I think you are bound to be generous to your young wife, as well as to your friend. It would be cruel to shut her out from the world. She is as good as she is beautiful. I know few young persons of her years for whom I have so great a regard as for Mrs. Kennedy."

Mrs. Ronald was quite affected as she came to the

close of this speech, which Mr. Kennedy heard with his unchanging smile.

"Mrs. Kennedy is much indebted to you for your good opinion," he said, courteously, "and will not, I trust, meet so hard a fate as that you predict."

"Not if the connexion between you and Mr. Dermot ceases," said Mrs. Ronald. "I say it again, I despise anonymous letters, but unless Mr. Dermot disproves this, you must share in the obloquy which will fall upon him."

"He will disprove it," deliberately said Mr. Kennedy; "it is a lie from beginning to end — Mr. Smith is alive and well."

Mrs. Ronald was staggered, but not quite convinced.

"Well, let him disprove it," she said; "but until then, Mr. Kennedy, let him not enter your house, or be seen with your daughter. Take my advice — it is that of a friend."

Mr. Kennedy had a conscience, not an inconvenient one, still his look fell as Mrs. Ronald spoke. Besides, how could he forbid Saint Vincent to its master, or Sybil's presence to her husband? Yet he wondered if he could not avoid the peril which threatened him to-day, and put back, for a while at least, the inevitable blow. Still smiling, he saw Mrs. Ronald up to the drawing-room. Scarcely had they entered it together, when Mrs. Kennedy appeared, lovely and gracious; then the other guests came, and last of all, Sybil, pale and silent, entered, and took her seat apart. Her father went up to her, and said, in a low, even key:

"Madame de Lonville got an anonymous letter this

morning, and all the people here have seen it; go out and watch for him, and keep him away."

Pale as death, Sybil rose and obeyed. She went out into the garden; she knew he would come back that way, and she waited — for once praying and hoping not to see her husband. But it was not to be. Slowly, and with downcast eyes and arms folded, he came towards her.

"Perhaps I can deceive him," thought Sybil, with sudden hope, "and cheat him into not going in."

So she clothed her face with smiles, and went on to meet him.

"Well, sir, where have you been the whole morning?" she asked, gaily.

"I was out on that business, Sybil," he replied.

"And have you succeeded?"

"I have — I now hold the proofs of that woman's guilt, Sybil. Let her slander me, if she dare?"

"Ah! if he knew! — if he knew!" thought Sybil, with an aching heart; but aloud she asked, "And what will you do?"

"I shall tax her with this, Sybil. I can, and will, do no more for the present. I believe your father means to go to-day, and we can at last have Saint Vincent in peace."

"But if — if it should be known later?" suggested Sybil.

"Why should it? Moonagh is to be found on no map. The death of that poor fellow made its way to no English paper that I know of. He had neither kith nor kin. He was one of life's adventurers; the waters of that troubled sea have closed over him, and

who will go and search for him in their depths, poor wretch?"

"But if some one else, for instance, should do what she tried to do?"

He looked down at her with his bright, genial smile.

"I had offended the coroner, and therefore he was against me in that sad matter; but he died since, and I need not fear him. I offended Mrs. Kennedy by falling in love with you, but I have her here," he added, touching his pocket, "and she is as harmless as a child! Sybil, I do believe, my darling, that I have no other enemy; I never willingly hurt or wronged living creature. Who, then, would be so cowardly or so base as to revive this foul slander? No one — believe me — no one! Human nature is not pitiless or inexcrably cruel, Sybil. Besides, there is always danger in wickedness, and every one knows that too. No," he added, still smiling, "I have thrown a weight of care away, and do not mean to take it up again. I mean to be very happy here with you, Sybil."

There was not a shadow on his face, not a doubt in his look or in his smile. His elastic temper had conquered the danger and the fear of his position; he shut his eyes to both, and only saw that he was at last the master of Saint Vincent, and the husband of a very fair young wife. Sybil's lip quivered slightly.

"It will break his heart!" she thought. "Oh! if I can but keep him here!"

It did not seem so difficult. That weight of care which Mr. Dermot had put by, had left room for other

feelings. He seemed very fond of his young wife, and much tempted to linger with her in the shade of that old garden. And Sybil was with him as Mr. Dermot had never seen her before. Till then she had betrayed rather than showed her fondness, and if she showed it now, it was so tempered with a pretty playful coquetry, that it both charmed and perplexed him. This was not his passionate young Sybil, either all shyness or all ardour; it was not his saucy young Sybil, with her little sharp speeches; it was an alluring Sybil, who was both coy and seductive, and who kept him chained to her side through those summer hours, bound there by a spell he did not care to break. Several times he spoke of going in, but Sybil treated the proposal with utter scorn. Go in! what should they go in for? Was he tired of her so soon? This was Mrs. Kennedy's party, her last, let her have it.

"But I promised Mrs. Ronald to sing," he said.

"Mrs. Ronald shall do without you," haughtily said Sybil. "Your wife wants you, sir!"

He looked at her dreamily.

"What ails you?" he asked. "I do not know you to-day, Sybil!"

"I suppose I am very happy," she said, trying to laugh.

"I hope you are — I am! You are a strange little enchantress, Sybil. You have the gift, the wonderful gift, which is granted to so few."

"What gift?" asked Sybil, slowly.

"The gift — I am sure no other woman, however much I loved her, could have played and trifled with me as you have for the last hour — I would not

endure it — but somehow or other from you I like it!" he added, candidly.

"They will be going soon, very soon," thought Sybil, with a beating heart. "Oh! if I can but keep him away till all is over!"

"I must go and look at the sea," she cried, suddenly leaving his side, and darting down a path.

He quickly overtook and arrested her.

"The sea is tame to-day, and not worth looking at," he said.

"But I want to see it," she replied, wilfully. "Come!"

"We are better here, Sybil, far from the seaside glare and sun."

They stood in the deep shade of a green alley; arched trees bent over them. It was an exquisite spot, a solitude both sweet and deep; but Sybil heard the far notes of Mrs. Kennedy's voice, and she trembled.

"Do come away!" she entreated.

"Why so?"

"Because I like it!"

"I think I must go in, Sybil!"

"And you will not please me even in that!" she cried, in hot indignation.

"My darling, I will do anything to please you!"

But he did not stir.

She slipped her arm within his, and gently led him away; but he only moved a few steps.

"Is that Mrs. Kennedy singing?" he asked.

"What of it — you do not care to hear her, do you?"

"Why not, Sybil? She has a splendid voice!"

"Now, do please me this once," pleaded Sybil, with tears in her eyes, "do — pray do!"

He looked down at her, wondering and irresolute. She twined her arms around his neck, and laying her cheek to his she kissed him. Alas! that kiss betrayed her.

"You little traitress!" he cried, putting her from him, and a light, half of love, half of anger, flashing from his grey eyes, "you are cheating me! Why do you want to keep me out?"

His wrath made her lose all presence of mind.

"Madame de Lonville got an anonymous letter this morning," she said faintly.

In vain he compressed his lips; they quivered with mingled wrath and pain. He had thought himself safe and victorious, and he was defeated. That shame that had been lying in wait for him so long, had come to him at last. Oh! unutterable bitterness! oh! hard lot, to be called from the tender follies of love to the grim reality of such an hour! He looked at his wife with passionate sorrow and resentment.

"And so," he said, "you were fond for that — you kept me here with your pretty ways for that — you gave and you denied, you attracted and you repelled for *that*, Sybil! Did you forget that I am your husband? How dare you do it? — how dare you give her the triumph of keeping me here — as if I feared her!" he added, the veins in his forehead swelling with indignation and resentment.

"Oh! forgive me — do, pray do!" she piteously entreated; "but I feared ——"

"What?" he sharply interrupted.

Her lids fell, her voice faltered.

"I feared they might insult you."

"And you did not want to share the shame of a disgraced man," he bitterly replied.

Oh! how deep a wound must that be which could make him speak so!

"Go in to them this moment if you think that!" cried Sybil, her face all in a flame; "go in to them and say, 'I am that Mr. Dermot whom you have wronged and slandered, and this is my wife.'"

His look softened; he sighed; he laid his hand on her shoulder, and kissed her cheek in token of reconciliation and forgiveness; but there was a settled darkness in his face, which told Sybil she was very far from him then.

"Go in," he said, a little coldly.

She did not dare to ask him what he would do. She turned towards the house, and once looked back; he had not stirred, but stood where she had left him, moody and still. She entered the drawing-room, unheeded; Mrs. Kennedy was accompanying a trio. Sybil looked at the three ladies, each with her music in her hand, and wondered how they could sing on such a day. No one minded her save her father, whose suddenly troubled eye showed that he could read her face. Yet Sybil had a vague hope.

"Perhaps he will not come," she thought, as ten minutes passed, and he did not appear.

Suddenly her heart gave a great throb — the door opened, it was he!

CHAPTER XXVII.

FOR a moment Mr. Dermot stood, pale and grave, on the threshold of the room; then he entered and closed the door. A sudden and dead silence followed. It lasted but one minute, perhaps but a few seconds, but that hush following on the loud murmur of conversation, and succeeded by a low subdued hum, was both marked and impressive. Sybil saw him cast a keen glance around; but she noticed that he went up to none, also that none came to him. He sat down in a remote part of the room, and remained there grave, watchful, and rather stern.

He had no need to watch long; Mrs. Ronald looked at her watch and rose. A whisper ran round the company. Several ladies rustled uneasily, several gentlemen exchanged looks; but deference for Mrs. Ronald probably suspended action, for when she said,

“Mr. Kennedy, may I request the favour of a few minutes’ private conversation with you?”

No one stirred. She sailed out of the room, and a profound stillness followed.

Sybil’s heart sickened. Did they know? Oh! if so, how she longed to go and sit by his side and take her share of his undeserved ignominy! How she longed to cry out to all these people, whose cold and averted glances were so significant,

“He is innocent — he is innocent, and you will live to blush for your cruel error! Look at him, and say if he can be guilty!”

She watched his face, and read volumes in it. Scorn,

pain, resentment were there, and, above all, a proud endurance. The endurance of a proud and patient spirit, patient because it is so proud.

"I believe it is my turn to sing," said Mrs. Kennedy, looking round with a bland smile. She pulled off her gloves, and went up to the instrument, and sang to her own accompaniment, and looked over it at Sybil and Mr. Dermot with a taunting, insolent look. Ere she had half done the door opened, and Mr. Kennedy looked in with a flushed face, and called out in a sharp voice,

"Miss Spencer! — will you be so kind as to come?"

Miss Spencer rose and left. The door closed upon her, and there was a murmur and a motion amongst the guests; but Mrs. Kennedy went on singing — she excelled in trills, and did not miss a note of that through which she was now going. But when she rose to leave the instrument, she perceived, for the first time, no doubt, that everyone, save Sybil and Mr. Dermot, was standing. In a moment Mrs. Kennedy was all amazement. They surely were not going? Why, the rehearsal was not half over!

"Mr. Kennedy!" she cried, addressing her husband, who now entered the room alone, "do tell these good people that we cannot spare them yet."

She spoke very gaily, and laughed as she spoke. But her husband's face remained flushed and stern.

"There is a storm coming on," he said, "and our visitors are afraid of being detained here too late."

"But we have spare beds," artlessly said Mrs. Kennedy, opening her blue eyes; "oh! plenty of spare beds."

But the excuse of the storm, which a lowering sky had suggested to Mr. Kennedy, was too convenient not to be eagerly taken. For these were well-bred people, who had no wish for an *éclat*, and affronted you as decently as they possibly could. A dozen heads gathered at every window. The sky was pronounced very threatening, but there was plenty of time to reach Saint Vincent, declared several voices, and chorus repeated "Plenty!"

With so fair an excuse for leaving the Abbey, no one remained behind. A hurried and universal leave-taking followed. Mr. Kennedy looked on coldly, but Mrs. Kennedy was loud in her regrets and her reproaches. How could they go so precipitately? It was a conspiracy, indeed it was; and she went from one to the other entreating, and reproaching, till her husband laid his hand on her arm, and looked her so sternly in the face, that, with all her hardihood, she felt compelled to desist.

At length they were all gone — the last flowing skirt, the last black coat, had vanished through the folding-doors, and these four — the two men and the two women, remained alone in the deserted drawing-room.

Sybil rose, and went up to her husband, who sat in the same place and in the same attitude, grave, unchanged, and stern.

"Oh! Mr. Dermot — Mr. Dermot!" she cried, "why did you not speak and crush them all? How could you bear it?"

He looked at her moodily without answering.

"I hate them all!" cried Sybil with flashing eyes; "I hate that Mrs. Ronald with her looks!"

"Hush!" he replied with a scornful smile, "let them be — let them be."

His hand wiped the tears from her flushed cheek, but the caress was careless and cold, and his look did not seem to see his young wife.

Her tears ceased at once. She felt that she was powerless to soothe this grief — she felt more, that there was not room for her in Mr. Dermot's heart just then. Nor was there. It is not in their first bitterness that love has power over such wounds. Mr. Dermot had drunk deep of the cup of humiliation within the last few minutes. He overflowed with resentment, and full upon him was the strong, hard longing for revenge. Mrs. Ronald and her friends were but lay figures in this tragic history — this drama which was being enacted between him and Blanche Cains, and in which, up to the present hour, he had been so signally and so cruelly beaten. His turn was coming on, and he felt no wish to spare her. There was little tenderness for woman in the Greeks of Theseus, when they fought against the Amazons, and for the womanhood of his false mistress Mr. Dermot now felt no mercy. Men seldom spare women, after all, when they meet in the great crises of life. Frederick the Great probably felt but limited compassion for Maria Theresa, and it was after he had slain Penthelisea that Achilles wept over her. So it was not, much as he loved her, at his fond little Sybil that Mr. Dermot looked now, though she stood by his side, tender and indignant; it was at the woman who had conquered and humbled him, and on whom he was going to inflict the same pangs which she had not spared him.

This keen intent look Mrs. Kennedy could not bear.

She found it a relief to turn to her husband's severe face. Its meaning she partly read. She knew attack was coming, and she forestalled it.

"Perhaps, Mr. Kennedy, you can tell me why Mr. Dermot honours me with his attention this afternoon?" she said ironically.

She leaned back on the white couch, with its brilliant flowers scattered on the cushions against which she rested. She looked both handsome and insolent. Mr. Kennedy stared at her with an odd mixture of love and anger. He knew she was dangerous, a mere syren luring him on to destruction; he knew she did not care for him, that she had married him for his money, that she was just now his peril and his ruin, but he had taken her for her beauty, and habit and time had not yet destroyed the enchantment. And Mrs. Kennedy knew both the source and the extent of her power, for, without waiting for a reply, she continued, with a scornful smile,

"Perhaps I have failed in courtesy. I ought to have congratulated you on your son-in-law, to be sure."

She laughed. The laugh had often charmed her husband's ear, but it now roused him to sudden fury.

"You wretched woman!" he said, "what ails you? What possesses you? — have you no sense, no heart, no conscience? — nothing but that miserable beauty?"

She laughed again; and glancing over at a mirror, smiled complacently.

"Nothing but my beauty," she said. "I believe that is something, however, Mr. Kennedy — at least, I have been told so."

Her tone was as cool as his was bitter. Mr. Ken-

nedy cooled down as if by magic. He had other work in hand than this light war of words.

"Mrs. Kennedy," he said, "Madame de Lonville got an anonymous letter this morning. Who wrote it?"

"You had better ask her that."

"There is wonderful baseness in an anonymous letter, Mrs. Kennedy — don't you think so?"

He looked hard at his wife, but she was impenetrable to such taunts or looks, and replied coolly,

"Mr. Kennedy, I have a horror of common-place."

"Mrs. Kennedy, you wrote that letter."

He was not prepared for her disdainful reply.

"Mr. Kennedy, I did."

"No, you did not!" he cried, stamping his foot; "but you did what was worse, ten times worse, you set on that wretched starving brother of yours to do it. You bribed another to do what you did not dare to do yourself."

This time the taunt reached her. She turned very white.

"Mr. Kennedy," she said, "your language is unmanly. You tax me with writing an anonymous letter, and when, to please you, I confess I did so, you insult me grossly. I will not stay to be insulted by you in presence of that man!"

She rose to go, but her husband locked the door, and put the key in his pocket.

"Dermot," he said, "where is that letter?"

Mr. Dermot rose, and handed him an open letter. Mr. Kennedy took out from his pocket-book the letter Miss Glyn had received, and placing them both side by side beneath Mrs. Kennedy's eyes, he said bitterly,

"You see this handwritting and that — one is an

unsigned slander some weeks old, the other is a letter which was written and signed yesterday by Reginald Cains. Is there any difference between these two, Mrs. Kennedy?"

She looked not at the letters, but at the two men who had combined against her, and there was unutterable resentment in the look; but she stood at bay. She was bold and defiant to the last.

"At whose instigation was the anonymous letter written?" asked Mr. Kennedy. "One directed to Miss Glyn did no great harm; but the other, sent this morning to that wretched magpie, Madame de Lonville, is by this over all Saint Vincent. We saw its work an hour ago. At whose instigation was it written, Mrs. Kennedy?"

"At mine," she said triumphantly; "of course, at mine, Mr. Kennedy."

He would have given anything not to believe her; but he could not doubt it. It was his ruin which her lips thus carelessly uttered, and it was not in his power to feel or say, "It is not true."

He looked at her in mute and powerless anger. What could he do to her to avenge this pitiless wrong?

"And so," he said at length, "I married you, I took you out of your poverty for this — these are your thanks — this is my reward."

"Don't be absurd, Mr. Kennedy," she scornfully replied; "if I was poor, I was young; and I don't see that you are so very rich after all."

"Be what could be your motive?" he cried, kindling again into wrath. "What could be your motive,

to write anonymous letters, and spread and circulate that slander here? — what could be your motive?"

For the first time Mr. Dermot spoke.

"Mrs. Kennedy's motive," he said coolly; "why, surely, James, you know it. It was to disgrace the husband of Sybil, and the master of Saint Vincent."

Mrs. Kennedy's blue eyes flashed; her lips quivered; she gave her enemy a look so implacable, and so fell, that Mr. Kennedy's lurking jealousy could not survive it. Ay, truly she hated the man who now stood by his side! The conviction came too late to give him any joy. That hatred had cost him too dear — dearer than Mr. Kennedy cared to give for any woman's truth.

"What more have you to say, either of you?" she asked, defiantly; "and what have you proved against me? — nothing. That is not my brother's writing; I know nothing of those letters — I deny it all!"

"There is a third letter," said Mr. Kennedy — "a forged letter, intended to send Dermot off to Canada."

A livid pallor spread over her face. So that man and her husband had been watching her all along! They had allowed her to go down to perdition, and risked ruin rather than check her evil course, and thought, more stinging still, she had been blind, whilst they had been both vigilant and clear-sighted. She was conquered; she knew it, but she kept her undaunted look and bearing.

"Mrs. Kennedy," said Mr. Dermot, coldly, and taking the two letters from Mr. Kennedy's hand, "let that do. I will spare you, for your husband's sake this

time, but let that do. The next time you interfere in my concerns — I shall show no mercy.”

“Do not,” she replied, with calm disdain; “you have both united against me, and I defy you both!”

She nodded at them, and went to the door. It was still locked; she looked at her husband, and imperiously exclaimed,

“Open the door, Mr. Kennedy.”

He went and opened, as she bade him. She passed by him with haughty sweeping skirts, and went up the staircase proud and defiant. He remained standing at the door, looking at his daughter and her husband. Sybil was by Mr. Dermot's side; her hands were clasped on his arm, and she looked up in his face with sorrowful earnestness, and with silent tenderness he looked down. Mr. Kennedy gave them a wearied, sullen look. It seemed but a few days back that he, too, loved a young and beautiful wife — and how had it ended? — how would it end with his daughter and his friend? Would they, too, live to wonder at this present folly, and loathe their dotage? He did not care; he cared about nothing then, and he went out of the room, and left them with that sullen, wearied air.

The passion of grief which Sybil had kept in so long, broke forth as her father closed the door. She burst into tears and sobs both sorrowful and indignant, for if she resented the treatment her husband had just received, it broke her heart to think that she had brought down that contumely upon him. It was for her sake chiefly that Blanche Cains so hated him. It was for her sake that he had suffered the bitter ordeal of disgrace through which he had just gone — with

manly patience, indeed, but also with a man's keen though silent resentment of wrong. He sat down, and drawing her to his side, he tried to soothe her grief away.

"Oh! Mr. Dermot," she entreated, "let us leave — let us fly this place!"

"No, Sybil — it would be cowardly, and it would be useless. I never intended flight. I never wished for concealment. I have weighed my fate well, and I can bear it. I know that I am shut out from life and its prizes — well, as I said, I can bear it. Saint Vincent is large, and I shall not leave it, unless when necessity compels me to do so. These shall be the real gardens of Armida, after all."

But the life which Mr. Dermot thus pictured to his young wife — a life of love and indolence — had no charms for her.

"You belie yourself!" she cried — "you wrong yourself, Mr. Dermot. Such a life is unworthy of you, and would only make you wretched."

"Poor little Armida!" he said, kindly; "you want your conquered knight to be brave and strong again, and he never will, Sybil — never; life has but one thing left for him now — the love of a young wife — let him have that."

He passed his arm around her, and laid his head on her shoulder; but oh! how sadly — how moodily he spoke! Disguise it as he might, he was made for action, not for rest, and fond though he no doubt was of her, he was of all men the last intended by nature for mere domestic joys. Sybil urged her theme again. She wanted to go away, to travel, to hide somewhere, and begin a new life, but Mr. Dermot gently resisted.

"Where is the use?" he sadly said — "it is only for your sake that I might wish to go, Sybil. But I will not fly my fate. Discovery would be sure to come sooner or later — it has come now — let it be. I will shut myself out from life, and fancy myself like the first man, since I, too, have got my Eve, and one who will never tempt me to sin," he added, with a grave smile.

"But who has cost you very dear," sorrowfully said Sybil. "Oh! Mr. Dermot, you cannot say that I am not the cause of all?"

"Not of all, but of much: but perhaps I like you none the worse for that," he replied, very kindly.

She turned her face away that he might not see the flush of joy his words called up. But he saw it very well, and he read its meaning. He knew that if she was dear to him, he was infinitely dear to her; and though that love could not fill up his life, it had the power to charm much of its bitterness away. Yes, in the midst of his humiliation, it was a keen joy to possess this bright young creature's perfect love, to feel within his inmost heart, "Let whatsoever fate come near me, this is mine!"

She was all that he had saved from the great wreck of his life. Peace, fair name, the world's regard, all had perished; but this was left — this, and no more!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MRS. KENNEDY was sitting by the open window in her room, moodily watching the coming of the storm her husband had predicted, and which was slowly gathering in the west. She cared naught for it. If it had laid waste all Saint Vincent, and blasted every tree within its limits, she would have cared naught still. Her brief reign and false splendour were both over. That old garden beneath her, those pleasant grounds, that fair abode, belonged to her enemy. She had embittered his possession of them, but they were his, and she must go forth. This was her weakness and his strength — he was rich, and she was poor. And where would her husband take her now? What sort of a home would he give her? She was in his power; this she felt, too. For his anger, for his reproaches, she cared nothing. She had been exposed to Sybil, and that her once adoring friend should have read her baseness, was the only sting of shame Mrs. Kennedy could feel; it was not much, but it was something.

But more, far more than all this, was the horror of poverty which had seized her, since she had learned that Sybil was Mr. Dermot's wife. Had she risen out of that slough of Despond but to sink into it again? And how they would pity her, Mrs. Ronald and all! — how they would lament the cheat Mr. Kennedy had practised upon her! For he had had her cheap, very cheap, after all; and though she had punished Mr. Dermot severely for Mr. Kennedy's sin, she had not thereby

lightened the insufferable load from her own shoulders. Besides, Mrs. Kennedy knew the world, or thought that she knew it. She worshipped money, and would not believe in a higher standard of merit with others.

"Before six months are out," she thought, with unutterable bitterness of heart, "they will all be crawling before Sybil and that man! Mrs. Ronald as well as the rest. Oh! I know them — I know them, vile wretches! I have not forgotten how they scorned Blanche Cains, and flattered Mrs. Kennedy! What is the good of a revenge that leaves him Saint Vincent?"

"Mrs. Kennedy," said her husband's voice.

She had heard him enter the room, but had not deigned to turn round. When he spoke, however, she gave him a slow, careless look, then turned back again to the window.

"Mrs. Kennedy," he said, very sharply, "I beg you will pack up and get ready. You cannot mean to sleep in Mr. Dermot's house to-night!"

She was stung, as he meant she should be; but she scorned to reply.

"I have taken a house in Saint Vincent," he continued, "and it is ready for you."

"A house in Saint Vincent! Perhaps you will condescend to tell me in what part?"

"In the main street."

Mrs. Kennedy's eyes sparkled with anger. There was not one good house in the main street, and she knew it. Did her husband mean to confine her in one of those shabby dwellings, with their narrow doors, and low ceilings, and dull windows? Had she married him for this? Was she to become the laughing-stock of all Saint Vincent?

"Mr. Kennedy," she said, rising and confronting him, "I will not go to a house in the main street!"

"You shall," he replied.

"I wonder how you will compel me to it?"

"And I wonder how you will avoid it?"

They exchanged looks of mutual defiance. He was the first to speak.

"Get ready," he said again, "and never go on with the miserable folly you were guilty of to-day. Dermot will be, as he has ever been, too much for you! And though I know he will spare you for my sake, do not trust to that too often. Let there be no more forged or anonymous letters, please. You are in his power, you know!"

"In his power!" she repeated, with unutterable scorn. "In his power!"

But she suddenly remembered the six numbers of the *Moonagh Herald*, and she turned on her husband with a flicker of triumph in her eyes.

"You are too good, Mr. Kennedy," she said; "but I trust that, as the *Moonagh Herald* is neither an anonymous letter nor a forged one, I am safe from Mr. Dermot's wrath there."

He turned pale as death, and looked wildly around the room.

She laughed aloud.

"Oh! you need not look at the bureau," she said, nodding with ironical triumph; "the papers are safe, Mr. Kennedy — safe!"

"Safe!" he repeated; "oh! for God's sake, Blanche, give them to me! — give them to me!"

"Oh! yes, quite safe," she pitilessly repeated; "I made presents of them this afternoon."

The extent of the calamity overcame his anger. He looked at her in a mute anguish, which at once sobered her. She saw that she had done something dreadful; that some yawning pit spread before her feet, and that she must fall into the dark abyss and perish there. She turned pale and trembled.

"There is one left," she said faintly; and she took the little sealed parcel out of her pocket. "I only took six."

One was left, and five were gone! One! He did not care for it. He was ruined and undone. One paper was enough to do it, and she had given five away that afternoon! She looked at him as he stood there, pale, ghastly, and silent, and she stamped her foot in mingled rage and frenzy.

"Can't you speak and tell me what it is?" she cried; "speak, I tell you, speak!"

He raised his sullen head and looked at her. Oh! what a mortal hate he now felt towards that young, adored wife, who had wrought his perdition! Love might come again, for he seldom dies that sudden, violent death; but for the time being, Hate was triumphant.

"You have ruined me," he replied; "but there is one comfort, you have ruined yourself too. You have dragged me down, but then I drag you down with me."

"But how? — how so?" she cried angrily.

"You have one left — look and see."

He walked out of the room. She heard him going downstairs. With a sort of stupor she listened to his receding step. Was he really going down to ruin, and must she follow him? Was there no escape for her, at least? She rallied and rebelled at the thought. She

tore the paper open. She devoured its contents. Again she found and read the coroner's inquest; but she found and read more; she read a paragraph in the third column of the fourth page, entitled *latest particulars*, and which ran thus:

"Since the close of this extraordinary inquiry, some new particulars have come to light. Mr. Kennedy, whose testimony was heard on the inquest, is now stated to have been the last person seen in the house with the unfortunate Mr. Smith. We also understand that Mr. Kennedy purchased a valuable patent from Mr. Smith two years ago, and that this patent subjected Mr. Kennedy to the payment of a heavy annuity, which ceases with Mr. Smith's death. Mr. Kennedy left Moonagh as soon as the inquiry was concluded, and it is believed he is gone to America. Mr. Dermot, whose manly and indignant protest against the foul accusation created so strong a feeling in his favour, is still in Moonagh."

"And I did not see that," thought Blanche, crushing the paper in her hands; "and I gave five away to-day."

Yes, you have dug a pit, and you have fallen into it, Blanche Cains. You have dishonoured your husband, and helped to clear the fame of your enemy. What justice and generosity would not let Mr. Kennedy do, your blind hatred for Mr. Dermot has done. The world knows now, the world of Saint Vincent, at least, knows that two shared the suspicion of Mr. Smith's death, and that the heavier doubt fell on the man whose name you bear. Whether accident or crime made Mr. Smith perish so miserably in Mr. Dermot's house, Mr. Dermot certainly was not the great gainer

by the close of that sad story. Innocent or guilty, he did not reap the benefit of that man's death.

"Oh! if I had known about that annuity," thought Blanche Cains, in a transport of grief and despair; "if Sybil, if Mr. Kennedy, if any one had told me! Why did not Reginald find that out? Why did he deceive me with half a story, when he must have known the whole, and been the veriest fool that ever lived? Did he go to Moonagh as I bade him, or gamble away the money, and bribe some wretch to do it, who betrayed us?"

She buried her face in her hands, not to receive her tears — Blanche Cains seldom wept — but to exclude every image, and concentrate thought.

Vain task — thought would not come. It was all a desperate chaos, over which shone no star of redemption. Oh! how easy it is to go down to ruin, that Avernus of the poets! how swift is the descent to that dismal world peopled with pale shadows and tormented souls! How impossible the return upwards to sunlight and sky and green earth! In vain this woman rebelled against her fate, and wanted to defy it; her husband's words rang in her ears, prophetic of their future:

"You have dragged me down, but then I drag you down with me."

And so he did. And there was no remedy; and, galling thought, she had done it. She had cleared her enemy to blacken her husband. And she must leave Saint Vincent, and Mr. Dermot and Sybil would remain in it. She looked around her very moodily. She saw the blue hangings, where the white Cupids ever played, and ever shot their arrows from behind Pompadour wreaths. She saw the costly carpet, the lace

curtains, the exquisite furniture, and which did she most hate then? The hollow splendour for which she had sold herself, or the deceiver, who was poor when she thought him rich, and dishonoured when she held him secure and strong in the world's esteem? It mattered very little, her chastisement was but beginning. This was only the first phase — the first dark hour of a long brotherhood who were to spring up again and again in her life.

At no time was Mr. Kennedy a man of many words. He now had but one thought — to make the best of the evil his wife had wrought.

He went down to the stable, saddled his horse himself, and rode off to Saint Vincent, without uttering a word to a living soul. Narcisse indulged in a few amazed ejaculations and remonstrances, but it was as if Mr. Kennedy heard him not.

Mrs. Ronald was within, and when Mr. Kennedy sent up his card he was admitted at once. Mrs. Ronald came down to him in the drawing-room, with the *Moonagh Herald* in her hand. She did so purposely, and on seeing it, Mr. Kennedy's faint hopes of winning her over to his cause sickened and died. Still, he would not be conquered without a struggle, and, trying to smile, he said,

"I need scarcely tell you, my dear Mrs. Ronald, what brings me here. The fact is, I have just learned that this unlucky paper was in your hands, and I could not bear to rest even for a few minutes under your evil thought."

"I never was so surprised!" gravely said Mrs. Ronald. "I found this in my carriage, and never was so surprised, Mr. Kennedy."

"It is a cruel, a vile slander," he said eagerly; "after lighting on my friend and partner, Mr. Dermot, it fell upon me, and the editor of the *Moonagh Herald* narrowly escaped an action for libel."

"I never was so surprised," resumed Mrs. Ronald coldly; "you had told me so positively that there was no foundation for the accusation against Mr. Dermot, that I was amazed to find you had deceived me, Mr. Kennedy; for of course I cannot say — I regret that I cannot — you were mistaken."

"My dear Mrs. Ronald, I regret having deceived you, but it was a secret I had no right to betray."

"A newspaper secret, Mr. Kennedy?"

"It was not known here, and never would have been, if Mr. Dermot and I had not had the misfortune to have an enemy, Mrs. Ronald?"

"Mr. Kennedy, it would have been known sooner or later, and had I been you I would have told it myself instead of concealing it."

Mr. Kennedy was silent a while. He wondered if she had read the paragraph that concerned him. He had no need to question; Mrs. Ronald soon enlightened him.

"Moreover, Mr. Kennedy, I think it was scarcely generous to Mr. Dermot to let suspicion and doubt rest solely upon him, when, as it now seems, you had your share of both. It is a very strange story altogether. So far as I can understand, Mr. Dermot had no interest in Mr. Smith's death, and need never have been suspected."

Mr. Kennedy looked hard at her.

"Do you mean to say that I ought to have been suspected, Mrs. Ronald?"

"I say nothing, Mr. Kennedy; but, to tell you the truth, I think it is you, and not Mr. Dermot, who ought to leave Saint Vincent."

"He will not leave it," sullenly replied Mr. Kennedy; "he keeps the Abbey and the mill. They are his."

Mrs. Ronald became scarlet. Not an hour ago Mr. Kennedy had told her that Mr. Dermot was leaving; and now she learned, not merely that he was staying, but that she, Mrs. Ronald, had been in the disgraced man's house, and had affronted him in his own drawing-room.

"Mr. Kennedy," she said, severely, "I can scarcely trust myself to comment upon such conduct. The next thing will be, I suppose, that Mr. Dermot marries your daughter?"

Mr. Kennedy paused before he replied. At length he said, slowly and deliberately: "They have been married privately for some time."

"Then, Mr. Kennedy," wrathfully said Mrs. Ronald, "you have behaved abominably to your friend and son-in-law. He certainly must be a very generous man to bear with such usage; and I tell you plainly that, if ever this matter is mentioned to me, I shall feel it my duty to state the case as it really is, Mr. Kennedy."

"And what good will it do him that you should injure me, Mrs. Ronald? I never sought to throw the blame of this upon him; but when accusation sought him, and let me go by, we both agreed to let the matter rest so. Dermot and I have been fast friends

for many years, and each of us owes the other many a good turn."

"Mr. Dermot has behaved like a gentleman," emphatically said Mrs. Ronald.

Mr. Kennedy smiled bitterly.

"He has," he said; "but the evil, so far as he is concerned, is done. I, too, am an innocent and slandered man, Mrs. Ronald. As God hears me, I am. Why, then, should you not spare me?"

Mrs. Ronald hesitated.

"Mr. Kennedy," she said, "you ask too much. I am expected to know thoroughly all that concerns the character of my friends. I cannot, if this matter is mentioned to me, seem ignorant."

"Your ignorance would prove it to be a slander, Mrs. Ronald," he boldly replied. "Who would believe that to be true which you did not know?"

"Mr. Kennedy, you ask too much," she said again, and this time with much stiffness. "My position in society involves a responsibility to which I must be faithful. I cannot deceive the persons who do me the honour to take me as their social guide, Mr. Kennedy."

She paused. Mr. Kennedy looked at her as if expecting more. Mrs. Ronald resumed, in her most patronising manner:

"If you ask my advice, Mr. Kennedy——"

Mr. Kennedy hastened to interrupt her, in order to assure her of the value he set on her counsel; she smiled graciously, and resumed——

"My opinion is, Mr. Kennedy, that you ought to leave Saint Vincent for a time. This unfortunate business must end by being forgotten, and I would further

advise you to be very cautious, and to feel your ground when you return. The world is not very lenient, Mr. Kennedy."

Who knew it better than the wretched man who humbled his pride before the autocrat of the Saint Vincent world? Cold as this comfort was, he looked grateful, and said, with a cheerful smile:

"Mrs. Ronald, I leave my case in your hands, and unless you feel compelled to mention it, I know you will not repeat the slander of this miserable, lying *Moonagh Herald*."

"Mr. Kennedy, I will do what I can, but I trust, for your sake, that this is a solitary copy."

Drops of perspiration stood on Mr. Kennedy's forehead. He tried to laugh.

"I fear not," he said — "I fear that four more copies were given to your friends this afternoon; only, I hope that, with your influence ——"

Mrs. Ronald rose in stately indignation.

"Four more copies!" she said — "why not a dozen? And you come to me, and ask me to commit myself for you, Mr. Kennedy? — you amaze me. I wash my hands of it, sir, and I say it with regret, for I have a strong regard for your unfortunate young wife, but all intercourse between us must henceforth cease. I cannot risk my position in society to render you a doubtful service, and what is more, Mr. Kennedy, I will not!"

Mr. Kennedy rose, and bowed haughtily. His case had been heard, and was dismissed. It was useless to humble himself any more to Mrs. Ronald. He left her without a word, and Mrs. Ronald, still hot and indignant, went to Miss Spencer's room, and found that

lady engaged in perusing her copy of the *Moonagh Herald*.

"So you too have got one," she exclaimed. "Well, of all brazen men, Mr. Kennedy must be the most brazen, to come to me and expect me to interfere in his case after that! I never heard the like, never!"

"But how strange a story!" exclaimed Miss Spencer. "I was looking for my handkerchief in my silk paletôt pocket, and I felt something cold and clammy. It gave me quite a turn, and it was this newspaper, wrapped up in a sheet of glacé paper."

"It is very odd. I am vexed I never thought of asking Mr. Kennedy how he knew I had got a copy. I cannot say I feel any regard or regret for him; but I am deeply sorry for poor dear Mrs. Kennedy!"

"She certainly is very much to be pitied," guardedly said Miss Spencer; "and perhaps, Mrs. Ronald, she could tell you who put this copy of the *Moonagh Herald* in my paletôt, for I saw her in the cloak-room just before the rehearsal began."

"In the cloak-room, Miss Spencer?"

"Yes, she came to see Mrs. Gray's mantle. I never saw so becoming a shape, and I told her so. All trimmed with Chantilly."

"Miss Spencer, your frivolity amazes me. What has Chantilly to do with poor Mrs. Kennedy's case, one of the most distressing I have heard of for a long time?"

"I only thought that she could perhaps tell us who

had left the paper there; it is so odd to find a sealed packet in one's paletôt pocket!"

Mrs. Ronald was staggered, but not convinced. Her faith in Mrs. Kennedy was stronger than appearances. Moreover, what motive could Mrs. Kennedy have for disgracing her own husband? But she was sorry she had neglected to ask Mr. Kennedy where he had got such correct and speedy information; and now it was too late to question him. It was provoking, but intercourse with that wretched man was over for ever, of course. And Mrs. Ronald expressed to Miss Spencer her deep concern at the unnecessary affront which had been inflicted on Mr. Dermot. To go to a man's house and insult him was something so indecorous, that Mrs. Ronald's feelings were quite hurt.

"I wish, Miss Spencer, you would write a note to him."

So Miss Spencer sat down and at once indited the following epistle: —

"Mrs. Ronald presents her compliments to Mr. Dermot, and begs to express her deep regret for what occurred to-day. Mrs. Ronald need scarcely assure Mr. Dermot that, had she known *all* the circumstances of the case, matters would have gone on very differently indeed. She concludes by assuring Mr. Dermot that if *her* influence can avail aught in Saint Vincent, justice shall be done to him."

"Shall I add anything for Mrs. Dermot?" asked Miss Spencer.

"No," sternly replied Mrs. Ronald. "I have no regard for that young lady. Ah! Miss Spencer, why did not that foolish Mr. Dermot marry that fine creature, Mrs. Kennedy? But men *will* be blind!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

WHEN Mr. Kennedy returned to Saint Vincent, his first act was to go to his study, lock himself in, and destroy the remaining copies of the *Moonagh Herald*. After this he went up to his wife. He remembered that she had one copy still, and he would not trust her with it.

"Mrs. Kennedy, I want that paper," he said, shortly, as he entered her room.

She pointed to the hearth without answering. He knelt on the floor, and scanned closely the heap of black ashes before him. Half-consumed fragments convinced him that his wife had really burned the *Moonagh Herald*. Ah! what would he not have given for the other five copies to be there too!

"Tell Ralph to pack your trunks," he said, rising.

"They are packed," she sullenly replied.

She did not ask where they were going, nor did he tell her. Both felt and knew that Saint Vincent was closed upon them. This was enough.

"The carriage will be ready presently," he said, turning away; "be ready too."

She did not answer; but there was no resistance in her pale face. She was conquered so far, that, provided she left at once, she did not care whither her husband took her. But though she wished to go, she scorned him for going! "If he were a man," she thought, "he would stay and defy them all!" And she remembered Mr. Dermot's haughty endurance that

morning, and envied Sybil the sad pride with which she had looked up at her husband.

There was not much nobleness about Mr. Kennedy; but whatever his wife might think to the contrary, there was no cowardice. He would have stayed in Saint Vincent, and defied or conquered opinion, had it not been opposed to his commercial prospects to do so. He was not a rich man, like his son-in-law, and he could not afford, like him, to sit down in idleness. When conquered, he must seek new fields of exertion; and to do so, he must stand fair in the esteem of his fellow-men. Mrs. Ronald and her circle were not the world; and he had scarcely crossed the threshold of her house, when his active brain had planned out a new promising scheme, which had helped to drive away the bitter remembrance of his present humiliation.

"I did not love him, and now I shall despise him," thought his wife, moodily. "I suppose he is gone to bid his daughter and son-in-law good-bye — let him. I would scorn to be so mean!"

As she came to this conclusion, Ralph informed her that the carriage was waiting. Mrs. Kennedy put on her shawl, sullenly tied her bonnet-strings, and went downstairs without a word. Whilst she settled herself in a corner of the carriage, and lowered her veil, and would see nothing, her husband was, as she had thought, bidding Sybil and Mr. Dermot good-bye. He had spoken in private to his son-in-law; but Sybil knew nothing — nothing, save that her father was going away.

"I suppose you will be happy in your way," he said, looking at them rather moodily; "well, let it be. I wish you may — I wish you may," he vaguely repeated; "you have been a good child, Sybil; and you,

Dermot," he added, looking at him very earnestly, "you have been more than brother or child to me. Good-bye, God bless you!"

There was no warmth in his voice, no fervour in the blessing. Sybil clung to him, and he kissed her, but cold was the caress; and cold the pressure of the hand he gave to his daughter's husband. They were happy, he saw it, and it was not in his power to see that happiness without bitterness of heart. Mr. Dermot knew better than Sybil what was in her father's thoughts. He gently drew her back, and released him from her caresses; and when Mr. Kennedy turned away and left them, he detained her as she half sprang after him.

"Let him go," he said; "you do him no good — let him go."

Sybil yielded. Mr. Kennedy walked away very slowly to the carriage, where his wife was waiting. Behind him he left wealth, love, and a name, from which the shadow was going away. And he went forth to meet poverty, hate, and disgrace. Something of this Sybil guessed, as she stood looking after him, with tears in her eyes. Mr. Dermot looked too, but different were his conclusions.

"Before a year is out," he thought, "James Kennedy will not care a rush for his wife, and he will either be a rich man again, or on the road to wealth. In him the commercial man will survive all else."

Scarcely had the carriage rolled away from the gates of Saint Vincent, when Denise came in with Mrs. Ronald's note. Mr. Dermot read it, and smiled, and handed it to Sybil, who reddened and looked scornful.

"Well, Sybil," he said gravely, "the world is

open unto us once more. Shall we call on Mrs. Ronald, or ask her here?"

"Never! never!" impetuously cried Sybil; "never let the woman, who insulted you without cause, enter this house!"

"And she never shall," he emphatically replied; "but yet, mind you, Sybil, that is solitude."

"Let it be. Saint Vincent is wide enough for me. We will make a new Eden of it, and let the world go by."

Alas! Eden is lost. Sin and death have closed its gates, and it will never be found again. Even as the fond girl spoke so, the long-coming storm broke forth. A lightning flash filled the room, and a thunder-peal shook the whole house. She turned to her husband with sudden dread.

In vain he spoke to her and bade her not fear. His voice was drowned in the fury of the storm. Violent and brief, like a tornado, it lasted but a few minutes, but when it was over, and silence returned, Mr. Dermot said,

"There will be many a broken bough, and many a shattered nest after this."

He rose and opened the French window of the dining-room, and Sybil, who looked from behind him, saw the garden smiling and bright before them. The sky was clear again, the sun shone across pools of water, and a blackbird, hidden in the topmost boughs of an ancient tree, sang triumphantly, careless of the storm, which had strewn the earth with torn branches, but had not reached his nest and his young.

Even so was their fate, and Mr. Dermot knew it. The storm through which he had just passed would

leave its traces in his life, traces that would last to his dying day. Miss Glyn he could forgive, for she had done him justice in her heart; but he felt embittered against that little world which had been so hard to him in his dark hour, and from his inmost heart he scorned its tardy penitence. He looked at the fond and true girl by his side, and resolved to set his heart there, not in idleness or uxorious fondness, but in all manliness and truth. She was young and pretty, and he loved her very much; and he liked that old home where they were to live henceforth. If this was not Eden after all, if this was earth bearing the full burden of man's sin — earth made for labour and endurance, it was also earth with love surviving the fall, and burning clear and bright above the dark tide of sorrow.

"And will you be happy here alone with me, Sybil?" he asked, with his most searching look.

"Happy! Ay, indeed, I shall only wonder what I have done to be so happy!"

"Nothing, I daresay. What share has one's doing in happiness? It comes and goes as God wills, being, as a rule, God's free gift."

"We can be happy when we please," wilfully said Sybil.

"Do you think so? I do not. The peace of an easy conscience, of duty fulfilled, of unstained honour, we can all attain. But happiness is something too exquisite for mortals to command. It comes unbidden — often unsought; and wise are they who take it when it comes, Sybil."

"Well, then, I was wise," persisted Sybil.

And he replied, with a grave smile,

"And so was I."

And did they really live alone, and make an endless honeymoon of life? What need we care to know! If their mood changed, their love did not. Besides, we may be sure that when Miss Glyn's commercial enterprises failed utterly, she came, for a while at least, to the Abbey, and liked Mr. Dermot rather more than she did Sybil. Mrs. Mush, too, was there now and then, and gave them news of how the world without went on, and how Mrs. Kennedy had conquered a new position, and was the star of the Welsh district where her husband had set up a new business, and was making a new fortune. Certain news, indeed, have reached us that Sybil's good-natured cousin contemplated the completion of her love-story with great satisfaction; and a speech of hers, that Sybil had a husband in a thousand, is a matter of fact, as well as Sybil's saucy reply: "In a thousand, Mrs. Mush! Why, you do not suppose I would have had him if there had been another like him?"

THE END.

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THE END.

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Kavanagh, Julia,

Sybil's second love in two volumes

Bd.: 2

Leipzig 1867

P.o.angl. 187 f-21/22

urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10929927-7